



JONATHAN E. FIELDING, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

CYNTHIA A. HARDING, M.P.H.
Chief Deputy Director

313 North Figueroa Street, Room 806
Los Angeles, California 90012
TEL (213) 240-8117 • FAX (213) 975-1273

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov

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April 19, 2013

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. *J. Fielding ms*
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **MISLABELED SEAFOOD**

On a motion by Supervisor Antonovich on November 20, 2012, the Department of Public Health (DPH) was directed to provide its next steps regarding mislabeled seafood. The report to your Board on December 19, 2012 provided a brief outline of the next steps. This is an update to that report.

On January 29, 2013, DPH convened a workgroup with the National Fisheries Institute (NFI), which represents 80% of fish distributors within the county, including the American Fish and Seafood Company, H&N Foods International, Southwind Foods Company, Great American Seafood Imports Company, and Pacific American Fish Company. On February 26, 2013, DPH convened the workgroup again with participation from these major distributors as well as representatives of the Chinese-American and Japanese Restaurant Associations. The purpose of convening the workgroup was to discuss DPH's approach to addressing seafood substitution/mislabeling including economic fraud.

Species substitution and mislabeling are considered economic fraud because a less expensive fish is substituted or mislabeled as a more expensive fish. For example, escolar, which poses a health risk to some consumers, is usually mislabeled as 'white tuna,' which, in fact, does not exist. The NFI, in particular, expressed their commitment to local efforts to stamp out economic fraud in the seafood industry.

The workgroup developed a list of the species of seafood most commonly substituted and/or mislabeled in Los Angeles County. The following list represents those species that DPH will focus on going forward.

Seafood Offered	Less Expensive Substitute
Tuna, White Tuna*	Escolar
Snapper, Red Snapper	Rockfish Tai Seabream Tilapia Ocean Perch Pollock Cod
Orange Roughy	Swai
Halibut	Striped Bass Fluke Turbot Sea Bass Flounder
Wild-Caught Salmon	Farm-Raised Salmon
* White tuna does not exist; it is a term used by retailers to appeal to consumers.	

Additionally, the workgroup determined that retailers need to be better informed of the measures they can take regarding seafood mislabeling and species substitution. With certain retailers, species identification discrepancies may be due to translational, cultural, or geographical factors. To address this, beginning in May 2013, DPH inspectors will hand out guideline materials during routine inspections of food facilities that offer seafood. The purpose of these materials is to assist operators in checking for proper labeling and cross-checking for seafood species. DPH will post the informational guidelines as well as an informational page for consumers on the DPH Environmental Health website, publichealth.lacounty.gov/eh.

When DPH inspectors observe discrepancies with species identification that are due to the actions of the wholesale distributor, a referral will be made to the appropriate State and federal regulatory agencies. When an operator observes species substitution or has mislabeling complaints discrepancies, DPH is encouraging them to report it via the DPH complaint hotline (888) 700-9995 or online Report-a-Problem on the DPH Environmental Health website. All complaints will be either handled directly by DPH, or referred to the appropriate State and/or federal authorities.

DPH will provide our next update to your Board by July 1, 2013. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like additional information, please let me know.

JEF:pk
PH:1204:004

c: Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors