COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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May 4, 2012

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. jefielding MD
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **MISLABELED SEAFOOD SOLD IN RESTAURANTS AND GROCERY STORES**

On April 24, 2012, on a motion by your Board, the Department of Public Health (DPH) was directed to make contact with federal and State agencies to identify gaps in local seafood import inspections that may be strengthened through collaborative agency efforts. DPH was further directed to assess the feasibility of Public Health's use of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) specialized laboratories for testing imported fish. The Board requested that DPH report back on the actions that can be taken by the County, State, and federal agencies to address the fraudulent and unsafe wholesale and retail practices referenced in recent press reports.

DPH contacted the FDA's Imported Seafood Safety Program whose responsibility includes assuring the safety of all fish and fishery products entering the United States. Additionally, DPH contacted the California Department of Public Health, Food and Drug Branch (FDB) whose responsibility includes assuring that foods in California are safe, unadulterated, and properly labeled. Both agencies acknowledged that economic fraud resulting from misbranding/mislabeling of seafood products may occur at any point of the food distribution network.

After looking into this issue, DPH, FDA, and FDB concluded that there are no gaps in the present regulatory/enforcement structure for the protection of public health. However, the agencies agreed that existing enforcement priorities of the agencies may not be consistent with what is needed to identify and prosecute cases of fraud. As a result of these discussions, the three agencies agreed to the formation of a Seafood Task Force (STF) that will survey wholesale and retail facilities that distribute or sell seafood in Los Angeles County. Survey findings will aid the STF in determining where the misbranding/mislabeling occurs and to what extent. Where economic fraud is believed to occur, the STF will investigate and take the appropriate enforcement actions. To bolster investigative efforts of suspected misbranded, mislabeled, or contaminated seafood, the FDA agreed to allow the STF to use its Irvine laboratory for analysis.

The STF anticipates surveys to commence on or before June 11, 2012. DPH will provide your Board with a report of survey findings by August 14, 2012. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need additional information, please contact let me know.

JEF:tp
PH:1204:004

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