



Sydney Fish Market Submission

Inquiry into the current requirements for labelling of seafood and seafood products

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Introduction

Sydney Fish Market Pty Ltd (SFM) is a working fish market which sources product both nationally and internationally and trades about 14,000 tonnes of seafood annually – with up to one hundred seafood species traded every day and approximately 500 species traded annually. In addition to our wholesale operation, Sydney Fish Market manages a site that includes six wet fish retailers as well as a number of cafés and restaurants.

Sydney Fish Market and our onsite retailers adhere to the Fish Names Standard and we strongly support the prospect of country of origin labelling of seafood extending to food service.

We therefore welcome this opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into the current requirements for labelling of seafood and seafood products with particular reference to the following matters:

- (a) whether the current requirements provide consumers with sufficient information to make informed choices, including choices based on sustainability and provenance preferences, regarding their purchases;**

The current legal framework ensures that retail consumers are able to discern the country of origin of products that they purchase, through point of sale labeling. This does not flow through to products sold in restaurants or other catering establishments, where much seafood in Australia is consumed. It is our view that in these establishments, the consumer often believes they are consuming Australian products and is willing to pay a premium for this attribute, when in fact they are consuming foreign product.

Additionally, The current arrangements for seafood labelling do not allow either retail or food service consumers to make choices on the basis of catch location, fishing method or other sustainability attributes unless the specific supply chain is looking to promote certain products' sustainability or provenance attributes that suppliers feel will be viewed positively by the consumer such as promoting a product from a specific location eg; Yamba King Prawns.

- (b) whether the current requirements allow for best-practice traceability of product chain-of-custody;**

The current requirements are tailored around a one up - one down - traceability system whereby a supply chain actor needs to be able to demonstrate that they can trace who they obtained a product from and who they sold it on to. In SFM's view this one up one down system has proven to work very well over the years and has successfully allowed both Food Authorities and Fisheries Management agencies to trace forward or back product when necessary for food safety (recall) or fisheries compliance purposes. In SFM's view this process works well and meets the current needs. We however acknowledge that this approach would not be viewed as best practice traceability with respect to seafood products such as that used in the EU.

Due to both major food safety and sustainability concerns in their jurisdiction, the EU has developed a sophisticated through chain traceability system (initiated through the EU Tracefish project) that has become a European Standard, (CEN CWA 16597:2013). Two ISO standards have also been developed; ISO 12875:2011 - Traceability of finfish products – Specification on the information to be recorded in captured finfish distribution chains and ISO 1287:2011 Traceability of finfish products – Specification on the information to be recorded in farmed finfish distribution chains.

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This system is very sophisticated and therefore best suited to an environment where seafood undergoes transformation in highly mechanised seafood processing factories primarily aimed at supplying the major retailer supermarkets. Whilst often considered to be best practice in seafood traceability it would not suit the current Australian industry due to the fact the industry here is much less focused on processed and packaged retail products.

- (c) the regulations in other jurisdictions, with particular reference to the standards in the European Union (EU) under the common market regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 Article 35;**

With regard to these requirements, namely,

(a) the commercial designation of the species and its scientific name;

(b) the production method, in particular by the following words "... caught ..." or "... caught in freshwater ..." or "... farmed ...";

(c) the area where the product was caught or farmed, and the category of fishing gear used in capture of fisheries, as laid down in the first column of Annex III to this Regulation;

(d) whether the product has been defrosted;

(e) the date of minimum durability, where appropriate.

The current Australian legislation does not specify this information as being required except for (a) the commercial designation of the species. This is addressed through the FSANZ Food Standards Code and the Australian Fish Names Standard. However, this standard, whilst referenced in the FSANZ Food Standards Code (FSC 4.2.1) is not specifically legislated and hence not being uniformly enforced by the various state and territory food (or fisheries management) agencies. SFM would like to see the Fish Names Standard legislated to ensure a common naming approach is adopted throughout Australia. Without this the opportunity exists for species confusion which can have either food safety or fisheries management implications.

SFM currently defines all 'aquaculture' products in our auction system therefore differentiating everything else as 'Wild Caught' by default. This production method information is available to our buyers and we support it carrying through to labelling at consumer level. In the longer term, this should extend to location and jurisdiction (state or commonwealth) as well as identification of capture in salt, estuarine or fresh water.

- (d) the need for consistent definitions and use of terms in product labelling, including catch area, species names, production method (including gear category), and taking into account Food and Agriculture Organisation guidelines;**

Given that current electronic traceability systems are relatively simple and often of a proprietary nature or are paper based processes, this has not been seen as an issue to date. SFM currently follows its own defined terminologies within its proprietary electronic traceability / business management system. The Fish Names Standard is the backbone of SFM's system and has been for seven years. We see it as an integral way to maintain our traceability system.

If through chain traceability systems were to be adopted (and hence information to be shared electronically between different seafood supply chain players), consistent definition and terms of

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use would become important to ensure that different electronic traceability systems can successfully "talk to each other". These definitions are readily available from the ISO traceability standards and FAO guidance documents.

(e) the need for labelling for cooked or pre-prepared seafood products with reference to the Northern Territory's seafood country of origin regulation;

SFM supports the principle that consumers are entitled to make an informed choice when making purchasing decisions. Our view is that the introduction of country of origin labelling for seafood sold through restaurants and catering outlets would allow the consumer to make this informed choice with respect to the country of origin provenance of their purchases.

(f) recommendations for the provision of consumer information as determined through the Common Language Group process conducted by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation;

The Common Language Group is not tasked with providing specific recommendations on the provision of consumer information but is tasked with gaining agreement on common terms used in the seafood sector with the aim to minimise confusion on particular terms for all actors in the supply chain. SFM is a member of the Common Language Custodian Group and fully supports this initiative.

As a first step, a draft common language on Australian sustainable wild capture fisheries is being developed. Two documents will be produced which contain consistent descriptions; one form of which is based on technical language which is more rigorous and in depth and the second version of which is focussed on using consumer facing words. These will be available for public consultation before being finalised.

SFM has reviewed the submission for this inquiry made by the Common Language Group and we support their recommendations namely;

1. That country of origin laws applicable to seafood, including unpackaged seafood, be maintained and strengthened.
2. That Country of Origin laws applicable to seafood be extended to apply in the restaurant and food service sectors.
3. That it be a legal requirement for food labels on seafood to carry the standard fish name in accordance with the Australian Fish Names Standard AS SSA 5300.

(g) whether current labelling laws allow domestic seafood producers to compete on even terms with imported seafood products; and

In our view the current arrangements allow both domestic and imported seafoods to compete on equal labelling terms however, there are exceptions. One exception is domestic caught product that is sent overseas for processing and then sent back to Australia for sale. Under the current legislative framework this product is not allowed to be labelled as Australian even though it is caught in Australia. This seems to go against the consumer perception of how this product should be labeled.

As outlined elsewhere in our response, product sold through restaurants and catering establishments, where no country of origin labelling requirement is currently required often leads to the consumer assuming product is Australian when in fact it is imported. This is also disadvantageous to domestic seafood.

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(h) any related matters.

At the recent IIFET (International Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade) conference in Brisbane (July 14) it was stated that on a worldwide level seafood is the third most misrepresented food (Petter Olsen from NOFIMA). If this worldwide situation is in any way mirrored in Australia it supports the case for standardised fish naming to be legislated uniformly across the country at every point of sale, and to ensure that this is backed up by targeted surveillance surveys using (when required) either protein or DNA detection methodologies to ensure that any deceptive practice is stopped.

Sydney Fish Market Recommendations

1. That Country of Origin laws applicable to seafood be extended to apply in the restaurant and food service sectors.
2. That it be a legal requirement for food labels on seafood to carry the standard fish name in accordance with the Australian Fish Names Standard AS SSA 5300.
3. That the current one up one down traceability system remains as the legally mandated system for food traceability.