

every fish has a tale

why story matters to the ocean



EATING FISH THESE DAYS IS A GAME OF BAIT AND SWITCH: What you think you're buying isn't what you get. Between a third and three-quarters of seafood is mislabeled in North America, meaning the fish isn't the species described on the menu or wasn't caught where it was supposedly landed. But the real victim of seafood fraud and mislabeling is not the consumer; it's the ocean. If we can't build a global market in which responsibly harvested fish garners a better price than fish caught by plunderers and pirates, then no economic incentives exist to spur industry change.

KEY FACTS

» 33% of all fish in North America is mislabeled.

» Sushi restaurants mislabel fish 74% percent of the time.

» Red snapper is labeled accurately only 13 percent of the time, tuna less than half the time.

» Illegal fishing causes economic losses of \$40 billion to \$94 billion annually to the global industry, which is valued at \$870 billion.

CHALLENGES

MOST FISH IS “MYSTERY FISH” So little fish is paired with story that attempting to shop responsibly as a consumer is often maddening and futile.

LONG-HELD CUSTOMS TRUMP EFFICIENCY Most landings of fish worldwide are recorded on paper. The opportunity for that data to be lost or changed as the fish travels through the supply chain is great. Middle-of-chain players might track aggregate fish volumes, but few tie processed fish fillets to the boat of origin. The inertia around these practices is substantial, given the lack of funds for new technology and cultural resistance from players throughout the chain.

INDUSTRY LACKS TECH KNOWLEDGE While large, vertically integrated companies have robust technology, the majority of the market—small-to-mid-size players—lack the technical expertise and the profit margins to buy better information management systems.

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OPPORTUNITIES

DINNER IS A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE The competing science and ratings of sustainable fish wallet cards are confusing. Everyone understands the need to cook something healthy and delicious for dinner. Chefs, fishmongers, and retail seafood counter clerks who focus on how to prepare fish, with sourcing as part of that conversation, win converts to support responsible harvesting.

STORY TRUMPS “SUSTAINABILITY” Consumers respond more warmly to story than to eco-labeling. Distributors who offer fish with QR codes that reveal the boat of origin, or who pass fish tales to restaurants for retelling on menus, are proving that consumers care about story—and are more willing to pay a price premium for it than for an eco-label.

TRACEABILITY IS A BUSINESS WIN The systems that allow middle of chain players to capture and assure story also deliver efficiencies and cost savings to the business. The argument to put in better systems is not compliance with NGO demands; it’s a reduction in overtime costs for processing labor, and therefore a decrease in cost of goods.

OTHER RESOURCES

Barton Seaver

Chef and director of the Healthy and Sustainable Food program at Harvard’s Center for Health and the Global Environment

www.bartonseaver.org

chge.med.harvard.edu

Maryland Department of Natural Resources

“True Blue” campaign

www.marylandseafood.org/true_blue.html

The Story of Sushi

vimeo.com/36994466

Sea to Table

www.sea2table.com

Norpac Fisheries Export

www.norpacexport.com

Red’s Best

www.redsbest.com

SOURCES SOFIA, NOAA, OCEANA