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Intelligence

# Suppliers, retailers and others call for improved seafood traceability standards in Canada

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## 'Robust traceability standards' for all seafood sold in Canada will curb unsustainable practices, fraud, human rights abuses and illegal fishing

A group of 26 grocery chains, seafood industry stakeholders and experts is calling on the Canadian federal government to create "robust" traceability standards for all seafood sold in Canada.

**In a letter** (<https://www.seachoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Boat-to-plate-stakeholder-sign-on-letter-Dec-2021.pdf>), the collective asked the federal government to "commit to an ambitious timeline and plan to fulfil your mandate to implement boat-to-plate traceability for seafood." It argued that the minimum standards should be expanded to ensure all seafood products are fully traceable from the point of harvest to final sale, including key information about "the who, what, where, when and how of fishing or farming, processing and distribution."

"Seafood follows a highly complex path from a fishing vessel to people's plates, with a risk of fraud and mislabelling at every step along the way," wrote the group in the letter. "In Canada, seafood supply



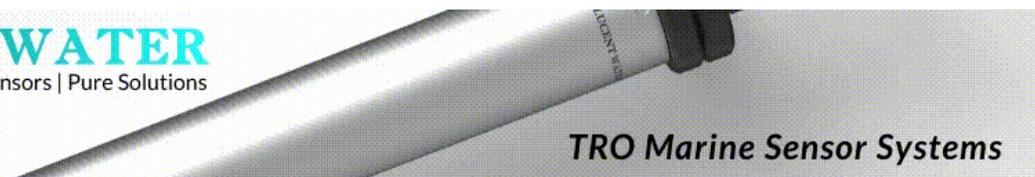
Grocery chains, seafood industry stakeholders and experts are calling for improved traceability standards for seafood sold in Canada. Photo courtesy of Oceana Canada.

chains lack transparency, which poses health risks, results in millions of dollars lost from the legitimate economy and perpetuates unsustainable production, human rights abuses and destructive illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.”

With jurisdictions worldwide increasingly requiring electronic data to follow seafood products through the supply chain to safeguard their true identity and point of origin and to ensure legality, the group argued that “Canada is being left behind on seafood traceability.” The signatories expressed concern that no timeline or plan has been put into place to implement a better traceability system, despite the initiative being announced more than two years ago.



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Moreover, the group argued that Canadians want seafood transparency: according to a YouGov Plc survey commissioned by SeaChoice in November 2021, 86 percent of Canadians support improved seafood traceability for all products sold in Canada.

“80 percent of the seafood we eat is caught in other parts of the world – including regions that use forced labor and illegal fishing practices,” said Sayara Thurston, Seafood Fraud Campaigner at Oceana Canada. “Canadians, including retailers, want to know where and how their seafood is caught, and they want the federal government to put a robust boat-to-plate traceability program in place to prevent Canada from contributing to these devastating practices.”



## Can handheld DNA testing technology stand up to seafood fraud?

The MasSpec Pen, developed to diagnose tumors, can identify fish species by touching the tip to a sample. But the species database is lacking.



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The signatories include prominent grocery stores, such as Sobeys, Buy-Low Foods and Save-On-Foods; suppliers such as Ocean Brands, Organic Ocean and Skipper Otto; and environmental groups such as SeaChoice and Oceana Canada. The letter was delivered to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as part of its recent boat-to-plate seafood traceability consultation.

The call to action is timely, as the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is currently studying seafood traceability in Canada. Specifically, it is looking for ways to support the sustainability and long-term viability of Canada’s seafood supply chains, while combatting fraud, human rights abuses and illegal fishing.

“Boat-to-plate traceability of seafood is central to preventing overfishing and illegal fishing,” said Ian Ricketts, President of Ocean Brands. “To contribute, we can work together to prevent overfishing by eliminating markets for seafood that are not traceable and likely caught illegally or with forced labor. While a lot of work has been done in the past to provide traceability for certain fish species, there is room for more progress to be made to look after our oceans.”

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