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Americans launch seafood traceability system

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THE US Congress is creating a national seafood traceability system that could combat rampant seafood mislabelling, after a bipartisan group of federal lawmakers today re-introduced the Safety and Fraud Enforcement for Seafood Act.

The House legislation, of which Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) is the lead sponsor, has the potential to lay the groundwork for a national seafood traceability system in the United States. It comes in the wake of yet another round of revelations about the extent of seafood mislabelling. A study released by advocacy group Oceana last month found that one-third of 1,215 samples analysed nationwide were mislabelled according to US Food and Drug Administration guidelines.

Matt Tinning, Executive Director of the Marine Fish Conservation Network, said today: "Seafood fraud hurts fishermen around the country, from Boston to the Bering Sea. In the face of overwhelming evidence about the scale of the problem, our government must act with urgency. Thankfully, some leaders in Congress have got the memo; today's bill takes a stand for America's fishermen."

Tom Dempsey, Policy Director of the Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association in Chatham, MA agrees. "More than ever, consumers are looking to support sustainable American fisheries. But, without transparency in the supply chain, it's nearly impossible to make that kind of informed decision. Whether it's horse meat sold as beef or some cheap seafood substitute touted as quality American product, we can't tolerate fraud when it comes to our food. It's unfair and unsafe. The SAFE Seafood Act can move us towards a level playing field that America's commercial fishermen need and consumers deserve."

Shockingly, Oceana's study found just seven of 120 samples of red snapper purchased nationwide were correctly labelled, with tests identifying the remaining 113 samples as another fish. Those findings have been greeted with dismay by commercial red snapper fishermen.

"It's frustrating as hell", said Donny Waters, a co-founder of Gulf Coast Professional Fishermen, who fishes primarily for red snapper out of Pensacola, FL. "I work hard every day to bring a quality product to American consumers. It's been shocking to discover how often seafood lovers around the country are victims of a bait and switch. They deserve far better—and so do I."

For the last two decades the Marine Fish Conservation Network has united fishermen, conservationists, scientists and citizens around a shared mission: saving and revitalizing wild ocean fisheries

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