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# Buying seafood

Everything they're  
not telling us



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A review of compliance with regulations on mandatory legal information on fish and seafood products sold in fish markets in Spain

## Executive summary

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### The problem

In Spain, mandatory labelling regulations are being breached on seafood products in all phases of the supply chain. In fish markets, one of the main channels for the sale of seafood, non-compliance is particularly serious. This directly affects the rights of consumers.

This breach of the law is unacceptable. The public authorities must be aware of the high degree of non-compliance with minimum legal requirements and ensure control in the labelling of seafood products. For its part the entire supply chain, including markets and supermarkets, must strictly comply with all mandatory labelling requirements.

The way in which we supply and consume seafood affects the sustainable development of the fishing sector and consequently the conservation of oceans, seas and marine resources. Responsible consumers should reject products of unknown origin, for example, those sold without mandatory information, since they may have been caught illegally or come from overexploited fisheries. *Responsible seafood businesses and suppliers, should source from sustainable fisheries, comply with the legislation, and this information needs to be accessible to customers through adequate labelling.*

### Objective

To achieve a real and effective change, it is necessary to know the degree of compliance with European and national regulations in Spain regarding the labelling of seafood products. The purpose of this report is to review publicly available mandatory information on seafood products in Spanish fish markets. We include a legal analysis of the applicable legislation and the results and analysis of our findings.

## Findings

We analysed the information provided on labels and signs for 266 products at 36 seafood stalls in fish markets. Our results show:

- Up to 70% of mandatory labelling information was not provided.
- The production method was missing on three quarters of all products.
- The scientific name of the species was missing on around eight in ten products.
- The area where the species was caught or processed was missing on up to three quarters of all products.
- Around 95% of all products lacked minimum duration or expiration details.
- The type of fishing gear used was missing on up to 85% of products.
- Overall just 2% of seafood sold was labelled with additional voluntary information and in the majority of cases, there was none.
- Readability or visibility of label information was inadequate for more than one in five products.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Following these results, we offer six conclusions and recommendations:

### Conclusion 1

The current regulations on compulsory information for consumers constitute a key element that contributes towards seafood sustainability.

### Recommendations

- Public authorities must train all operators in the supply chain on seafood sustainability, responsible sourcing and the problems that may arise from the inadequate conservation and management of the fishery resources on which they depend.
- Public authorities must inform the consumers about the importance of labelling and its environmental purpose through awareness campaigns.

### **Conclusion 2**

The existing legislation is complicated to follow for two reasons: firstly because it is referred to in different legislative texts, and secondly because different legislative bodies including European, national and within the autonomous communities, have different competences for approval and enforcement. .

#### Recommendations

- Public authorities must synthesise and recast the different existing legal texts in order to make clear the rules.
- Public authorities must ensure that all operators in the supply chain have a proper understanding of the rules, through appropriate information campaigns and the development of descriptive guides.
- Competent public authorities must create a streamlined consultation body, which is able to resolve queries that may arise in relation to relevant regulations.

### **Conclusion 3**

All the mandatory legal requirements for seafood products are essential for consumers to be able to make a responsible purchasing decision.

#### Recommendations

- Public authorities must raise awareness to both the seafood supply chain and to consumers of the importance of mandatory information and the link to sustainable fisheries and the conservation of fish stocks and the marine environment.
- Owners of the seafood stalls must ensure that all mandatory information is available to consumers.
- Consumers should become more informed about responsible seafood choices.

### **Conclusion 4**

The municipal markets are one of the main sales channels of unprocessed seafood products; 25% of the total volume of fish consumed in Spain is sold in this way.

#### Recommendations

- Fish markets have an important role in the supply chain and must incorporate environmental sustainability into their sourcing policies and provide that information to the consumer.

### **Conclusion 5**

Fish markets are currently seriously in breach of the mandatory seafood labelling regulations, with only 30% compliance of the requirements at best.

#### Recommendations

- Stallholders must comply with all mandatory information for seafood products.
- Public authorities must enforce strict compliance with all current legislation on seafood products sold in fish markets.
- Competent authorities must support the stallholders to develop the necessary skills to comply with the regulations.
- Consumers should only choose seafood products that provide all mandatory information requirements

### **Conclusion 6**

There is insufficient control by the Spanish authorities on the compliance of regulations regarding the labelling of seafood products.

#### Recommendations

- Public authorities must carry out an exhaustive control and its corresponding follow-up in municipal markets, to monitor compliance with compulsory information on seafood products.
- Public authorities must guarantee an adequate number of effective inspections and, where appropriate, initiate and impose the corresponding sanctioning process.
- Public authorities should guarantee the transparency of the control process and the results and make them publicly available.
- Public authorities should provide information to stallholders about the regulations in relation to infractions, sanctions and the administrative procedure, in cases of non-compliance.
- The different administrations should coordinate their efforts in terms of control and enforcement of these regulations.