

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
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Chilean Sea Bass Frequently Asked Questions

The public is rightly concerned about the health and abundance of fish making its way into the American seafood market. Chilean sea bass is gaining a popular following now that it is offered in many restaurants and supermarkets. Conscientious consumers want to know that the Chilean sea bass they buy is legally caught and safe to eat. This fact sheet will help make an educated choice.

Why is this fish called Chilean sea bass?

Chilean sea bass is a deep-water species also known as *toothfish*, caught in southern ocean waters near and around Antarctica. The Chileans were the first to market toothfish commercially in the United States, earning it the name *Chilean sea bass*, although it is really not a bass and it is not always caught in Chilean waters. It is a different species type than the sea bass caught in U.S. waters. Because of its white meat appeal, Chilean sea bass usually fetches premium prices in specialty markets and high-end restaurants. It is a deep-water fish that can live up to 50 years and grow to weigh over 200 pounds.

Is Chilean sea bass an endangered species?

No. But large, unreported catches from illegal fishing of this valuable fish has made effective management difficult. In 2000, more than 16,000 tons of Chilean sea bass were legally harvested in the Antarctic management area. Estimates vary, but there may be up to twice that amount taken illegally. Some Chilean sea bass fisheries are managed in a responsible manner, but there are some areas where the species has been and continues to be overfished.

How is Chilean sea bass currently managed?

A 24-country commission (The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) responsible for

conserving fish within Antarctic waters is helping to conserve Chilean sea bass with catch limits and other management measures. As an active member of the commission, the United States participates in these conservation and management decisions for Chilean sea bass in Antarctica. Individual governments regulate the Chilean sea bass fisheries within their own national waters.

Is Chilean sea bass trade regulated?

Yes. In order to address the problem of illegal fishing, the Commission has adopted a measure requiring that all imports of Chilean sea bass be accompanied by a document verifying that the fish were caught legally. U.S. Customs and NOAA Fisheries regulations do not allow Chilean sea bass imports without this document and a valid dealer permit issued by NOAA. In addition, the United States works closely with Chile to ensure that Chilean sea bass imported from there has been legally caught and is properly documented.

Is Chilean sea bass available in the United States?

Yes. U.S. regulations allow imports of Chilean sea bass that are caught within legal limits and that provide for the sustainable use and conservation of the fishery resource. However, some illegally harvested Chilean sea bass does enter the United States. Restaurateurs and consumers should ask questions before buying Chilean sea bass to ensure that the fish being purchased were legally harvested.

What can restaurateurs do to ensure they are buying legal Chilean sea bass?

Restaurateurs should insist that their fish brokers verify the source of their Chilean sea bass and buy the fish only if you are shown the proper documentation.

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What can be done to ensure the purchase of legal Chilean sea bass?

Ask the seller to verify that the fish was legally caught, in accordance with management provisions of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Even if the seller does not know, the fact that the question was asked will send a message to distributors that consumers are aware of and concerned about the problem of illegal fishing and imports.

How is Chilean sea bass legally caught and marketed?

Mostly by hooks attached to long-lines, strung behind fishing boats. Some Chilean sea bass is caught in waters off the coast of Chile, then iced and shipped to the United States fresh. However, the majority of Chilean sea bass is harvested in distant

waters of Antarctica, frozen onboard factory vessels, and shipped several weeks to several months later. Both fresh and frozen Chilean sea bass are available for consumption in the United States.

Who fishes for Chilean sea bass? Who consumes it?

Argentina, France, Chile, Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Korea and Uruguay are the primary countries harvesting Chilean sea bass. They fish in the waters of Antarctica and in the national waters of nearby countries. The United States, Japan, and the European Union are the major markets.

How much Chilean sea bass does the United States import?

The U.S. imports about 10,000 tons of fresh and frozen Chilean sea bass, or somewhere between 15 to 20 percent of the worldwide Chilean sea bass catch. ❖

Additional Information

U.S. Import Control Program:

Office of Public Affairs

NOAA Fisheries, U.S. Department of Commerce
(301-713-2370)

Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic
Marine Living Resources:

Office of Oceans Affairs

U.S. Department of State (202-647-3262)