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U.S. TURNS AWAY IMPROPER PATAGONIAN TOOTHFISH SHIPMENTS
Clarifies Intent to Enforce International Conservation Provisions

NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the U.S. Commerce Department, is cracking down on imports of Patagonian toothfish that don't meet required documentation.

A large shipment of toothfish, also known as Chilean sea bass, was recently seized because of unauthorized signatures on the catch's certification, a clear violation of international Conservation Measure 10-05.

"NOAA Fisheries will deny entry of toothfish shipments into the United States if they were not harvested and documented in a manner consistent with international conservation measures," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries.

Patagonian toothfish are managed through the international Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Through participation on the commission, the United States has helped implement an international system of tracking legally caught toothfish through a catch document that must be certified by the vessel's flag nation.

Measure 10-05 states that only the port official of the landing/exporting country may authorize the landing/re-export of toothfish. Shipments certified and signed by anyone other than the official of the ports of landing and export/re-export are unauthorized and will be turned away by the United States.

Hogarth stated that the action signals a strong commitment to keep poached fish off the American seafood market by taking further steps to close trade loopholes for Patagonian toothfish, according to Hogarth.

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Significant delays in approving shipments for entry into the United States have resulted from the non-compliance with two key provisions of the international Patagonian toothfish management program concerning import tracking and vessel monitoring through appropriate electronic vessel-monitoring systems (VMS).

Compliance with Conservation Measure 10-04, also requires all vessels harvesting toothfish to carry a specific type of VMS, which must be polled at least every four hours to track its location by the vessel's flag state. Recently, some vessels applying for toothfish import pre-approval have been unable to produce the required documentation that these monitoring systems were installed and tracked every four hours by the flag state of the vessel.

"Frequent and consistent polling of vessel monitoring systems is critical to curtailing illegal fishing, and so we will not allow shipments into the country if this rule is not followed," Hogarth said.

In a letter sent this month to Dr. Denzil Miller, the executive secretary of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, Hogarth advised that nations planning to send Chilean sea bass to the United States may call NOAA Fisheries in advance to determine if the shipment will be accepted. Such a step could speed up the approval process and prevent shipments from being turned away when they reach a U.S. port. Inquiries and questions may be directed to the U.S. toothfish import control officer, Kim Dawson, by phone at 1-228-769-8964 or by e-mail at kim.dawson@noaa.gov.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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