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Chair
Standing Committee on Country of Origin Labelling
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Submission to the Standing Committee on Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL) by the Australian Barramundi Farmers Association (ABFA)

The ABFA is the peak body that represents the interests of the majority (by number and volume) of the commercial production of Australian farmed *Lates calcarifer*, referred to in Australia as Barramundi.

The industry is an advocate for increasing seafood consumption in Australia and truth in labelling. ABFA does not seek to limit the import of seafood, just to ensure that there is effective labelling so that consumers, including diners, can make informed decisions regarding their meal choices. In 2006 when the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code was amended to require all seafood be labelled by Origin to the point of sale, it excluded the food service sector. This lets dining consumers down by denying them this information. We seek to have the current system extended to include the food service sector.

We believe the ideal situation is for the current Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL) legislation to be extended throughout the supply chain, including dining outlets, which would therefore include seafood sold for immediate consumption. The issue of CoOL and its misuse, by omission, is of particular concern to the ABFA, the Australian fishing and seafood industry, and consumers generally. This issue is compounded when it involves our Iconic species, such as Barramundi.

This extension of existing legislation will ensure consumers at all purchase points within the supply chain have the correct information to allow them to make an informed choice. This allows them to make a decision regarding the level of support they wish to give to the Australian commercial fishers and aquaculturists, based on a range of considerations.

To provide some supporting information in relation to the impacts non-labelling of seafood has, recent research undertaken by the ABFA, with the support of the Seafood Collaborative Research Centre (CRC), identified the following;

- Australians consume about 20,000 tonnes of Barramundi each year, but only around 40% is Australian product, (farmed 33% and wild caught 7%), with the balance imported.
- The name Barramundi has an iconic status in its relationship to Australia, including indigenous Australians, recreational fishers and, importantly, consumers.
- To Australians, barramundi means Australian, and when purchasing it they believe it is an Australian product and are prepared pay a premium over imported cheaper fish. Without labelling, by omission people are assuming they are buying Australian fish.

Other research has shown that;

- In the Northern Territory (since 2008), where labelling laws apply to the food service sector, when serving seafood, restaurants are charging a little more for Australian product (often serving Australian and imported, but identifying a price differential). People are now more aware of the labelling requirements and it is well supported and greatly influences consumer choice.
- In the NT it showed that the cost of complying with the seafood labelling laws was not significant, there was a high level of compliance, it happened very quickly and it assisted consumers in making informed choice.
- Research has shown that country of origin is second only to freshness in guiding consumer choices. Therefore, where a cheaper product dominates a higher value end of the market due to a lack of consumer information, it is unacceptable.
- For the Australian public and tourists, seafood is synonymous with the Australian lifestyle and the vast majority of consumers assume that when they purchase seafood when dining, their purchase is a product of Australia. Eating local product is a key aspect of the whole seafood experience and tourism industry - lack of labelling is misleading.
- Australian consumers want to buy Australian, with around 70% saying they prefer Australian to imported seafood - without labelling this is not possible. This preference is for a range of reasons including supporting Australian businesses, environmental, sustainability and labour laws as well as health considerations.
- Locally grown or harvested produce is enjoying growing support by retailers, and consumers and they wish to know the provenance of their food.
- There is significantly higher mark-ups being made on imported seafood without the consumer being informed - this is misleading behaviour and highlights the need for consumer protections.

The ABFA would welcome the opportunity to provide any additional information to the Committee if this was deemed necessary. We recommend that the Committee support changes to the current CoOL laws to extend labelling requirements as to origin throughout the supply chain, including for seafood sold for immediate consumption, including dining outlets.

We believe the current situation denies consumer choice, impacts on Australian jobs and contributes to the ongoing attrition of Australian businesses involved in producing food for the nation.

Yours sincerely

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EO ABFA

Relevant references;

Calogeras et al, June 2011 Tracking the impacts on seafood consumption at dining venues arising from the Northern Territory's seafood labelling laws, -

Lawley 2013. Repositioning Australian Farmed Barramundi in the Domestic Market

Ruello & Associates, 2011. A Study Of The Composition, Value And Utilisation Of Imported Seafood In Australia

Ruello, N., 2006. Retail Sale and Consumption of Seafood – Melbourne. Fisheries Research and Development Corporation