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**Washington State Fish Broker Fined, Sentenced to Jail
In False Seafood Labeling Scheme**

A Washington state man has been fined \$160,000 and sentenced to 30 days in jail for intentionally mislabeling 136,000 pounds of turbot from China as much higher priced U.S. halibut—one of the strongest sentences ever imposed for this type of violation, according to enforcement officials from NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement in Seattle.

Kevin D. Steele sold almost all of the fish to retail outlets and restaurants in Utah and Texas.

Steele pleaded guilty last November to federal felony charges and misdemeanor violations, and was sentenced April 24. In addition to the fine and imprisonment, Steele will be placed under court supervision for five years.

"False labeling is theft, plain and simple," said Vicki Nomura, special agent in charge of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement in the northwest region. "Fraud cheats customers and undermines the consumer's confidence in the marketplace. This particular fraud is especially noteworthy because the mislabeled fish was sold in a region where many people are unfamiliar with halibut."

Steele bought more than 136,000 pounds of turbot from a fish wholesaler in Rhode Island between 2003 and 2006. The fish was labeled as turbot from China. Steele had the fish shipped to a cold storage facility, where he repackaged and re-labeled it as "Halibut Portions" or "Halibut Pieces," and "Product of USA."

The felony violations are punishable by up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, and the misdemeanor violations are punishable by up to one year in prison and a \$100,000 fine.

The case was investigated by the NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Jim Oesterle, who leads the U.S. Attorney's Office working group on environmental crimes in Seattle.

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