



Fishy doings on some restaurant menus

By Hugh Robert

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Something's fishy on restaurant menus these days.

Faced with soaring demand for and dwindling supplies of some desirable species, unscrupulous seafood dealers are apparently making substitutions in their product lineups.

According to recent media reports in the Miami Herald, Mahmood Shivji, a geneticist who heads the Guy Harvey Research Institute in Ft. Lauderdale, FLA, recently tested the fish served in about 100 restaurants across the country.

The Institute specializes in research on overfishing and its impact on marine biodiversity. Shivji used CSI-style genetic testing to identify the fish species being served. In more than half the instances the fish on the plate turned out to be something different from the variety listed on the menu.

Grouper and red snapper proved to be the most common fraud species. Shivji determined that catfish and tilapia, both of which are much cheaper, were being substituted.

The research avoided placing the blame for such practices solely on restaurant owners and chefs, noting that, due to lack of government inspection and testing, species swapping can easily take place at any point in the seafood supply chain.

Food chicanery is, of course, nothing new to the restaurant world.

Substituting pork soaked overnight in milk for high quality veal is an all-too-common ploy used to boost profits.

Adding water to salad dressing, whipping ice with butter to increase its volume and "stretch" it are other oft-practiced ingredient ruses.

Food adulteration stratagems like these aren't only dishonest. They're potentially life threatening, since they raise the possibility of exposing those who suffer from food allergies to allergy triggers.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to discourage such food handling malfeasance, since the bottom line impact it can have is often substantial.
