NOAA Fisheries Service  
Office of Law Enforcement  
Southwest Region  
NEWS RELEASE  
501 W. Ocean Blvd, Suite 4200, Long Beach, CA 90802

Contact: Mike Fergus (562) 980-4022 (pager: 888-472-5680)  
Mike Gonzales (562) 980-4049 (pager: 800-876-2406)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Highest Assessed Penalty on West Coast  
Levied on Sea Food Processor  
(Federal Fisheries agency cites Monterey processor with 299 counts of violations to Magnuson-Stevenson Fishery Conservation & Management Act)

In a civil penalty assessment that sets a record for the west coast under the Magnuson-Stevenson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, NOAA Fisheries has issued a Notice of Violation and Assessment (NOVA) to Consolidated Factors, Inc. (CFI, does business as: Sea Products Company) of Monterey, California citing 299 counts of violations along with a $539,000.00 fine.

Between September 1996 and June 1997, CFI falsified reports of actual volume of groundfish landings, used bogus vessel names, and traded in the illegal catch.

During that time, cooperative surveillance and investigation by NOAA Fisheries special agents and the California Department of Fish and Game revealed an illegal excess volume of Sablefish (black cod) being landed and sold to Sea Products Company. Current regulations set a 300 lbs-per-vessel limit for black cod.

Relying on an illegal fishing operation involving three vessels, two of which were inoperable, Sea Products Company documented receipt of numerous catches, falsifying records to indicate 300 lbs per vessel. This activity took place on numerous occasions between September 1996 and June 1997. Previously this year, the owner and operator of the vessel were also charged and the vessel seized.

"At a time when the groundfish fishery is experiencing severe quota cutbacks and closures, putting many fishermen at risk of going out of business, we're gratified to be able to bring justice to those who apparently care so little about their fellow fishermen, let alone the fishery," said Mike Gonzales, Special Agent In Charge for the fisheries agency in the Southwest region.

Black cod or sablefish are one of the west coast's most valuable fishery resources. The purpose of the 300 lb daily limit is to allow small catches of black cod when fishing for other species. However, because of the value, some fishermen are targeting black cod. "We're not about to let this kind of blatant violation go by without serious consequences. Hopefully this action will send a strong signal and wake up call to those who are engaged in or thinking about illegal fishing," said Gonzales.

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