

Fishmongers netted calling catfish a barra

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Consumer affairs reporter

NOT content with passing off Vietnamese catfish as basa or pacific dory, fishmongers have now been caught selling the cheap import as top-grade local barramundi.

Three NSW companies, including the respected Costi Bros Seafood, have been fined up to \$6500 for duping consumers by selling fish under false names.

NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said the Costi Bros store at Roselands, in Sydney's southwest, was caught passing off imported Vietnamese catfish as more expensive barramundi fillets, and shark as deep-sea cod fillets.

The retailer was also selling vannamei prawns from Thailand as local king prawns.

Chief industrial magistrate Gregory Hart fined Costi Bros \$6000 plus costs of \$3700. The company refused to comment.

Yesterday, farmed Barramundi was selling for about \$12 a kilogram, while correctly labelled Vietnamese catfish was fetching

just \$6.50 a kilogram. About 90,000 tonnes of Vietnamese catfish is imported into Australia each year and many of the boneless, skinless, lightly flavoured fillets end up on consumers' plates under the guise of basa or the made-up name of pacific dory.

Vietnamese catfish comes from the Mekong Delta, one of the most polluted waterways in the world.

"Customers have a right to know exactly what they're buying and we will continue to crack down on any type of scam that misleads people," Mr Macdonald said.

Another retailer, The Seafood Factory at Weston, near Newcastle, was fined \$6500 plus costs of \$3200 after repeatedly ignoring Food Authority warnings to correctly label imported vannamei prawns, sold as king prawns.

In the third case, Penrith Seafood was fined \$3375 for selling Asian scallops as the more expensive Tasmanian scallops.

A national survey in 2004 found up to one quarter of all fish sold in Australia was mislabelled.