Chilean Sea Bass

- Patagonian toothfish, seen in restaurants and fish markets as Chilean sea bass, is a slow-growing inhabitant of deep, cold waters in the Southern Hemisphere, particularly Antarctica. The fish has a high fat content and mild, white flesh that forms large flakes when cooked. It is similar to the black cod of the U.S. west coast.

- Patagonian toothfish became commercially available in the U.S. in 1991. The harvesting of this fish is regulated by the 24-country Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, or CCAMLR. The main markets for this species are the U.S., Japan and European Union.

- Chilean sea bass imported into the United States is monitored through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). While importers have been required to carry special permits to import this species for many years, renewed enforcement activities were instituted by NMFS in September 1998.

- Despite CCAMLR’s efforts, illegal poaching of Patagonian toothfish by vessels from non-CCAMLR nations has been a problem. However, new controls to prevent illegal fishing have been implemented. In July of 1998, the Norwegian government barred any Norwegian flag vessel engaging in poaching or other illegal fishing activity from obtaining a license or quota to fish in Norwegian waters.

- In May 2000, CCAMLR implemented a catch certification scheme that traces Chilean sea bass from the actual harvesting vessel to the marketplace to further control illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing. Chilean sea bass cannot enter the United States without this certification. Consumers should ask their restaurant or fish vendor to verify that the fish was legally caught.

For more information, visit the National Marine Fisheries Service website at www.nmfs.gov, the FDA’s Fish Encyclopedia at www.fda.gov or the NFI website at www.nfi.org.

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