

# Ten years later: Brussels restaurants still serving mislabelled seafood



December 2025

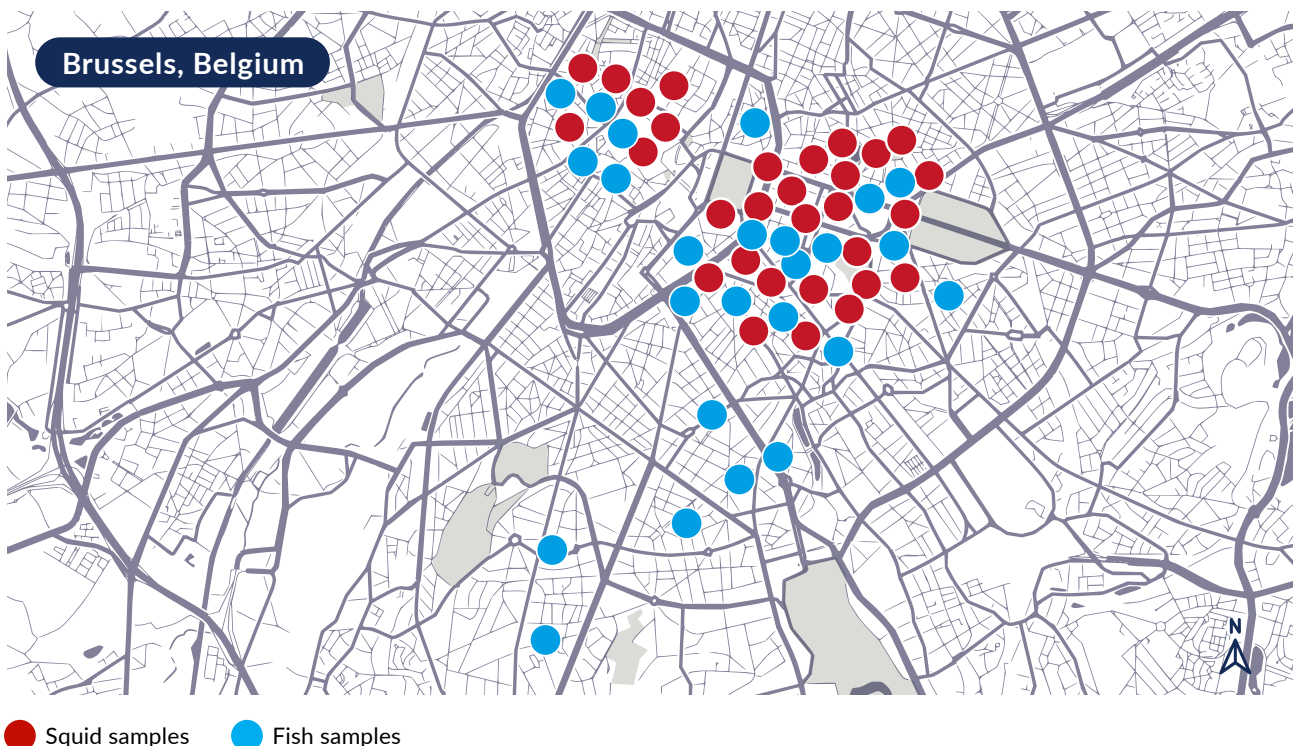
Using DNA methods, Oceana sampled fish and squid sold in restaurants in Brussels, including in the canteens of the European Parliament and the European Commission. Ten years after we first investigated seafood mislabelling in Brussels, the results reveal that information provided to consumers about seafood is frequently lacking or misleading.

## Has fish mislabelling improved in Brussels?

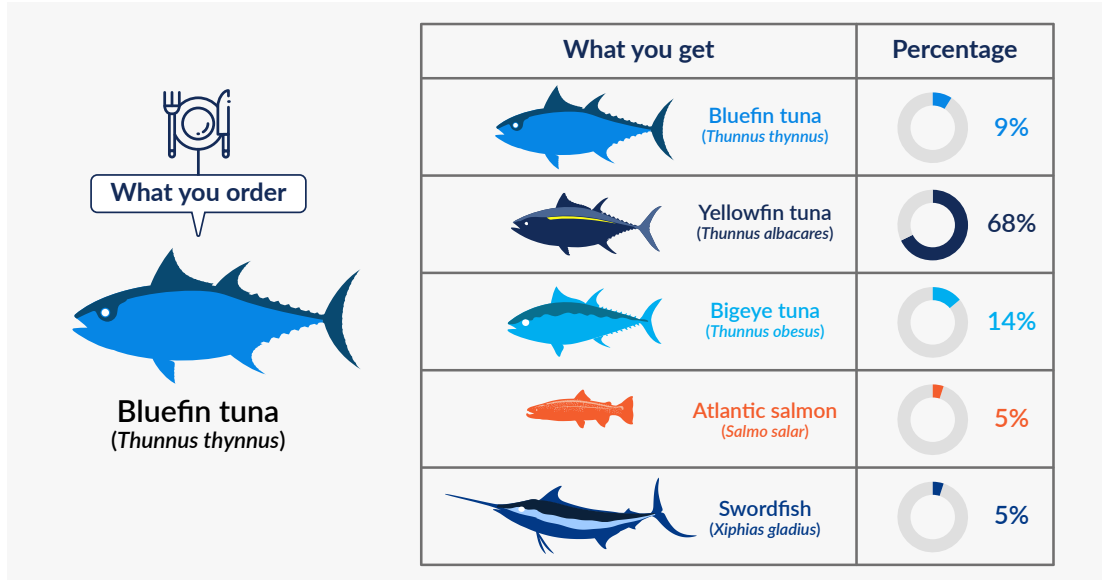
In 2015, Oceana carried out a research study in partnership with the University of Leuven, in which we investigated the mislabelling of fish sold in restaurants across Brussels.<sup>1</sup> The results were sobering: 30% of all samples were mislabelled, and 95% of bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) samples were substituted by the more common and cheaper yellowfin tuna (*Thunnus albacares*) and bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*). Data had been gathered from 280 restaurant samples across Brussels, including the canteens of the European Parliament and the European Commission. Our findings showed that fish mislabelling was generalised across Brussels, revealing weaknesses of seafood labelling and traceability systems.

Ten years later, Oceana investigated the current situation in Brussels, to assess whether any progress has been made. As part of a much larger seafood DNA study done in collaboration with the University of Pisa,<sup>2</sup> Oceana sampled 30 fish dishes from 26 restaurants across Brussels, including the canteens of the European Commission and European Parliament (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Locations of restaurants in Brussels sampled for fish (blue dots) and squid (red dots).



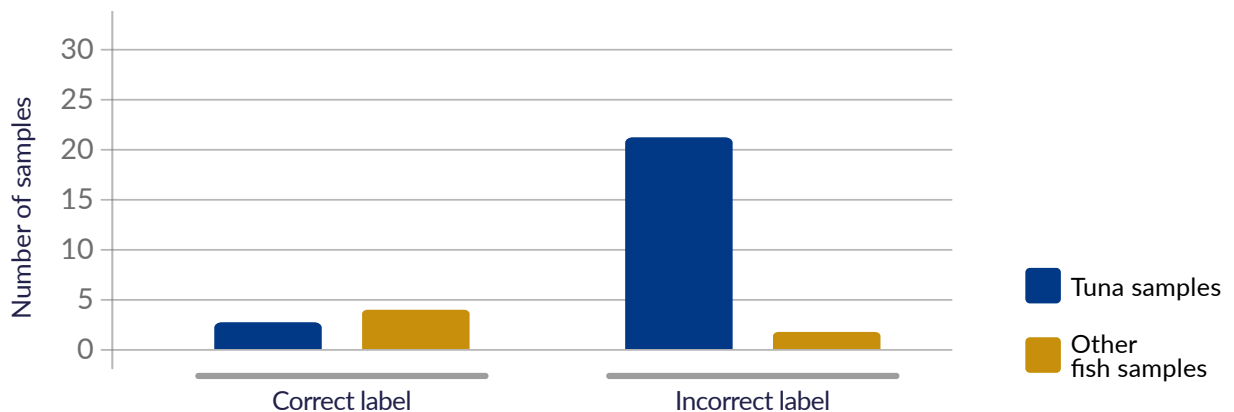
The total mislabelling rate of 77% in restaurants remains incredibly high and was largely driven by the enduring mislabelling of tuna. Indeed, 88% of the tuna was mislabelled, with results reminiscent of the 2015 study (Fig. 2), showing that bluefin tuna continues to be widely substituted by cheaper species like yellowfin and bigeye tuna, and also Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) and swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*).



Despite the lower number of samples in 2025 compared to the 2015 study, the results are striking. When tuna species are not specified on the menu and restaurant staff are queried, they tend to fall back on the most common and familiar answer: *bluefin tuna*. The error in these claims was also reflected in the price; the average cost of misrepresented bluefin tuna dishes was around 15 euros,<sup>a</sup> whereas the average cost of actual bluefin tuna dishes was around 28 euros.<sup>b</sup>

The focus of this study was largely on tuna, but several other species were also sampled in the canteens of the European Parliament and European Commission.<sup>c</sup> Although the dishes voluntarily displayed relatively precise labels with the common and/or scientific names of the species, two out of six samples were mislabelled. Both contained European hake (*Merluccius merluccius*) but were labelled as *Theragra chalcogramma* (Alaska pollock) and *Macruronus novaezelandiae* (blue grenadier) instead.

Figure 2. Number of correctly labelled and mislabelled fish dishes, obtained from 26 restaurants in Brussels, including the canteens of the European Parliament and the European Commission.



<sup>a</sup> Based on 20 misrepresented bluefin tuna samples.

<sup>b</sup> Based on two correctly represented bluefin tuna samples.

<sup>c</sup> A total of six non-tuna samples were taken from the European Parliament and the European Commission canteens.

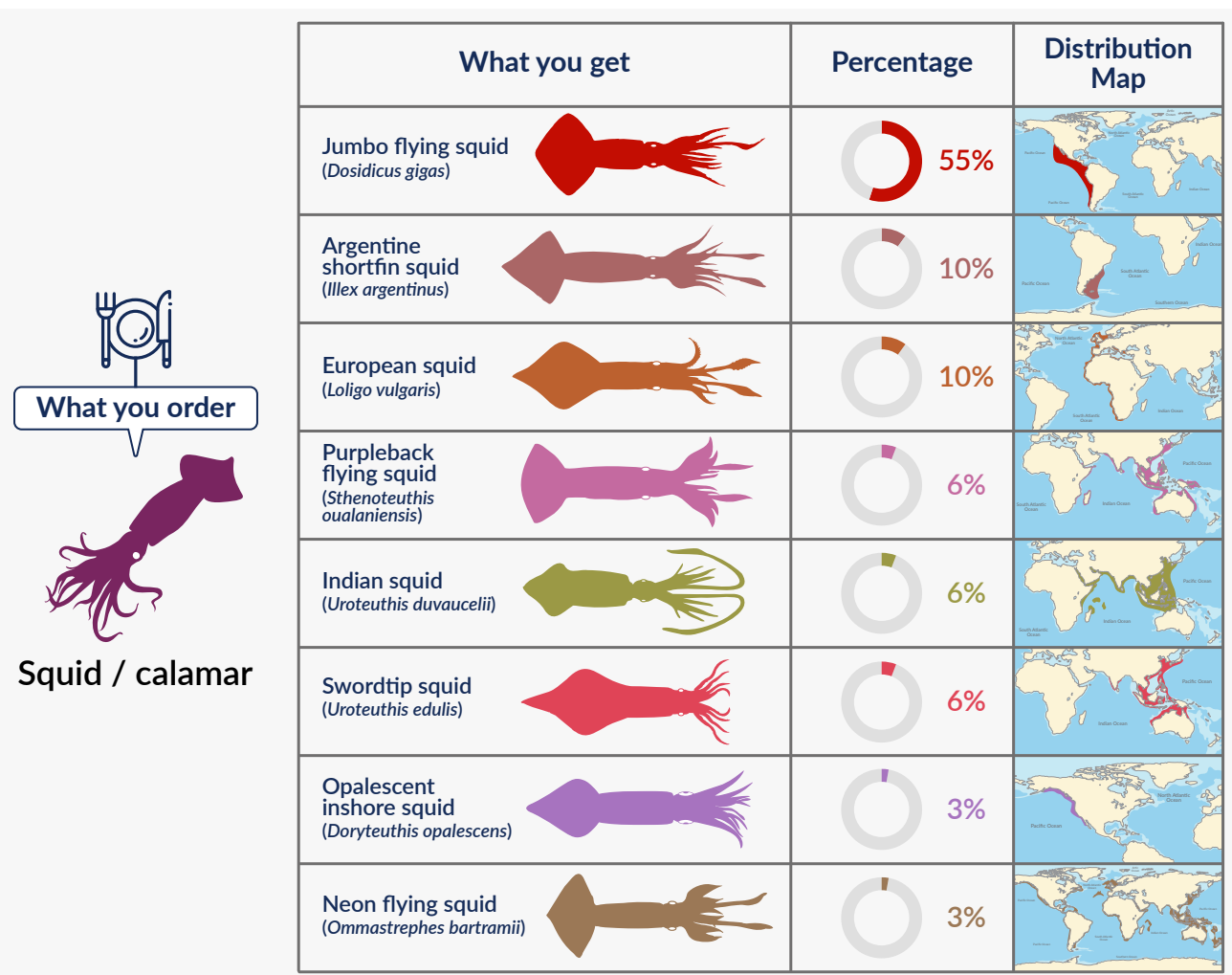
## What hides behind general “squid” names in Brussels?

“Squid” is not a species, but a diverse group of more than 300 species, with varied life histories and conservation statuses. A lack of traceability and transparency behind squid products is particularly problematic, as certain globally traded species have been associated with fleets that operate illegally and engage in serious human rights abuse.<sup>3,4</sup> Despite these risks, squid sold in Brussels are labelled merely as “squid” or “calamar”.

As part of the same DNA study carried out in partnership with the University of Pisa,<sup>2</sup> Oceana sampled squid dishes sold in 34 restaurants in Brussels including the canteens of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

**Strikingly, not a single establishment was able to provide us with the names of the squid species that they prepared and sold.**

Whereas the European Parliament and Commission canteens indicated the scientific or common names for fish, they did not for squid. Our DNA analyses revealed that 55% of the squid sampled in restaurants, mostly in the form of battered squid rings, consisted of jumbo flying squid (*Dosidicus gigas*). The high prevalence and lack of labelling of this species is particularly worrisome, given its association with fisheries mismanagement, illegal fishing, and human rights violations on board certain vessels.<sup>4</sup>



## Conclusion

Ten years after Oceana's first mislabelling study of seafood served in Brussels restaurants, the situation does not appear to have improved. Some products like "bluefin tuna" are almost systematically mislabelled and others, like "squid", consistently lack consumer information.

While the European Union has made strides in improving seafood traceability and transparency for some products, major loopholes still exist. Restaurants fall through the cracks of consumer labelling regulations in the EU and are not required by law to provide any information to consumers on the species they serve or their origin. This is reflected not only by a lack of consumer information, but also by a lack of interest or knowledge from restaurant staff who struggle to provide accurate answers.

Restaurants, cafeterias, and hotels account for roughly 30% of seafood consumed in the EU<sup>5</sup> yet transparency measures on the products sold in these establishments are non-existent, leading to absent, incorrect, or misleading seafood labels. Without information on species and their origins, consumers cannot make informed choices and are at risk of buying a product they might otherwise reject. At the same time, unethically sourced products continue to enter the EU market, contradicting the EU's zero-tolerance approach to illegal fishing and efforts to mitigate human rights risks along supply chains.

**Consumer labelling requirements for seafood must be extended to the catering and restaurant sectors to help close these major transparency gaps.**

## References

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- 3 Environmental Justice Foundation. (2025). *Bright lights, dim prospects: The urgent need to address unregulated squid fishing in the Southwest Atlantic to avert a looming environmental crisis*. <https://ejfoundation.org/resources/downloads/Bright-lights-dim-prospects-squid-fisheries-Southwest-Atlantic.pdf>
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- 5 European Commission: Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. (2025). *Common Market Organisation (CMO) provisions on professional organisations and consumer information: final report*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2771/0246060>



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