

Directors of Trading Standards
Heads of Environmental Services (England)
Chief Port Health Officers

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CEFAS, SFIA, DEFRA

20 August 2003

Reference: ESA XX/XX

Dear Colleagues

POTENTIAL HEALTH ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH THE CONSUMPTION OF ESCOLAR

Today the Agency issued a Category D Food Hazard Warning regarding the possible mislabelling of escolar (*Lepidocybium flavobrunneum* and *ruvettus pretiosus*) as sea bass. There are also some potential health issues associated with the consumption of this fish.

Escolar contain very high levels of oil (generally between 14 to 25% of wet mass) in the fillet. Escolar oil contains mainly wax ester (>90% of oil). If the fish is prepared incorrectly (e.g. if it is battered) and not cooked in such a way to remove some of the oils (e.g. grilling helps reduce the oil content) or, eaten in large quantities, the high indigestible wax ester nature of the oils may cause stomach cramps and diarrhoea (which is often orange and oily) in consumers. Additional symptoms may include headache, nausea and vomiting. These effects usually develop within 3 – 12 hours after ingestion with recovery usually within 24 – 48 hours. The illness may be more severe in the elderly and those with an existing bowel condition. Similar symptoms are also associated with scombrototoxin poisoning (caused by elevated histamine levels produced from the bacterial breakdown of some fish) resulting from the improper storage of scombroid fish (including tuna and mackerel). Thus, illness due to the high oil-content of escolar could be mis-diagnosed as scombrototoxin poisoning. However, it is possible that in some cases scombrototoxin may be a contributing factor.

Enforcement Officers are asked to ensure that there are no cases of mis-describing this particular species of fish. This could be undertaken by visits or explanatory letters to relevant importers, wholesalers, retailers and caterers to make certain that they are aware of the legal and health consequences of selling/supplying this fish species, without a proper description. It is likely that many food business proprietors are unaware of the potential health consequences of consuming escolar.

Further information can be obtained from the Agency website (www.food.gov.uk) see below.

Yours sincerely

David Statham
Director
Enforcement and Food Standards Group

Enclosures:

Illustrations of escolar (*Lepidocybium flavobrunneum* and *ruvettus pretiosus*)

These details may be accessed from the Agency website (www.food.gov.uk) following the links or directly via <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/rfe1ec.html> and <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/rfe0oi.html>

World Wide Web ver., v. 11-29-95

Species: *Lepidocybium flavobrunneum* (Smith, 1843)
Common Name: SL/AFS-Escolar
RFE Code: lepiflav I94-002
Photographer: W Savary (SAN-DO)
Date: 09-13-94
Image #: 257



Scanner: DTS-103AI Drum
Filename: ecrd001.tif
Date: 08-11-95
Original File: 12Mb, 400dpi
Orig. Image arch.: SEA-DO
Tissue arch.: SEA-DO/SAN-DO
Fish Provided by: USDC
Authen. T. Iwamoto, CAS, 05-04-95

RFE Team: Tenge, Barnett, Savary, Rogers, Dang
RFE Funding: OS/CFSAN and ORA
RFE contact: btenge@fdaem.ssw.dhhs.gov
RFE WWW coord.: F. Fry (CFSAN)
Internet: frf@fdacf.ssw.dhhs.gov



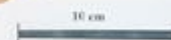
"Regulatory Fish Encyclopedia: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/rfe0.html>
Office of Seafood and Office of Regulatory Affairs, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 1993-2003."

World Wide Web ver., v. 09-24-96

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Date: 08-18-96
Original File: 12Mb, 400dpi
Orig. Image arch.: SEA-DO



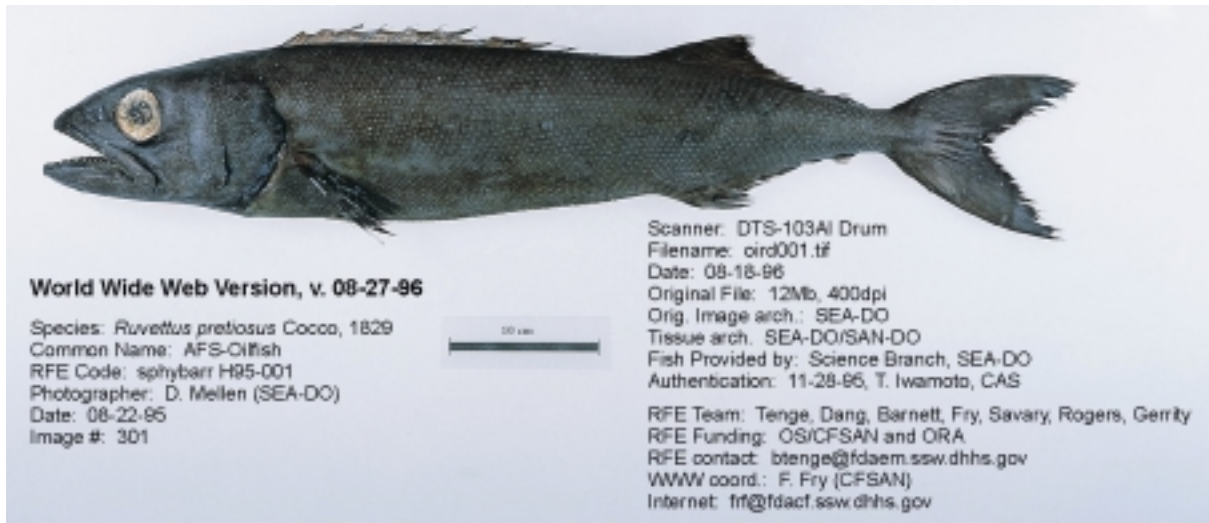
Tissue arch.: SEA-DO/SAN-DO
Fish Provided by: USDC
Authentication: 09-18-96, T. Iwamoto, CAS



Species: *Lepidocybium flavobrunneum* (Smith, 1843)
Common Name: SL/AFS-Escolar
RFE Code: lepiflav L95-001
Photographer: B. Tenge (SPRC, SEA-DO)
Date: 12-20-95
Image #: 310

RFE Team: Tenge, Dang, Barnett, Fry, Savary, Rogers, Gerrity
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