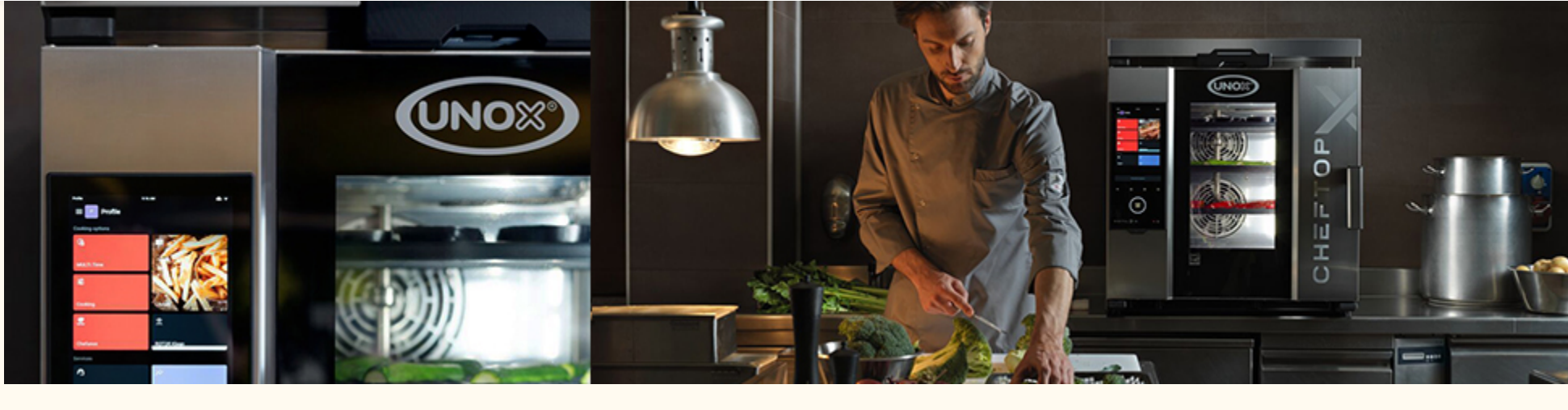




MENU | IN-DEPTH

Country-of-origin labelling for seafood in restaurants is coming

Starting 1 July, 2026, Aussie seafood lovers will soon be able to select their preferred catch in restaurants and cafes, with country-of-origin labelling (CoOL) to be added to menus.

By Maida Pineda April 7 2026 5 min read



Starting 1 July, 2026, Aussie seafood lovers will soon be able to select their preferred catch in restaurants and cafes, with country-of-origin labelling (CoOL) to be added to menus. The Minister for Industry and Science, Ed Husic announced the new labelling requirements, in a joint release with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Julie Collins.

“The Albanese government is giving people the clear choice to buy Australian when they want to. Australian consumers value locally-sourced seafood for its high quality and sustainable practises, but feel menus don’t currently offer enough information to make an informed choice.

Once in place, venues such as restaurants, takeaways, pubs and clubs will be required use the Australian-Imported-Mixed (AIM) model to indicate the seafood’s origin from three options:

- A (Australian)
- I (imported)
- M (of mixed origin containing both Australian and imported seafood)”

Labelling seafood in restaurant menus comes into effect. 20 years after retail started labelling seafood.

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According to Veronica Papacosta, CEO of Seafood Industry Australia (SIA), “In 2006, there was the acknowledgement by the Australian Government that country-of-origin labelling was necessary for people to be able to understand where their food was coming from. I was in the retail sector at the time, and I remember the huge improvement it brought to the consumer awareness, but also to the retail landscape, particularly seafood. I remember with the changes and the improved visibility; we saw a material drop in substitution.”

She explains the cause of delay in labelling for restaurants, “The premise was that in a retail environment, you can put the country of origin labelling on a package that has to sit on a shelf. In a restaurant environment, the main premise was that you could just ask your waiter.”

But apparently this is not the case. Papacosta explains, “Because seafood is a much more complex landscape than beef, chicken or lamb. If you walk into a restaurant any day of the week and say, ‘Where’s the beef from?’. Apart from the recent lifting of the ban on US beef, but 100% of the time it’s Australian beef. So, it’s an easy question to answer. When it comes to seafood, it can be really complex. Any particular restaurant menu can have four or five different restaurant seafood products on it. It’s really hard for people to be up to date every day or every week on where their seafood is from.”

Waiters were out of the loop

SIA did consumer testing surveying waiters in restaurants to check if they knew where their seafood came from and most said they didn’t know, or ‘from the ocean’ was the most common response.

It is astounding that 64% of the seafood consumed in Australia is imported.

Papacosta points out, “We want consumers and diners to ask why. Why is 64% of seafood imported when we’ve got the world’s third largest EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone). We want the consumers to think about what’s happening to their Australian seafood industry.” EEZ refers to over 8million square kilometres of maritime area Australia has sovereign over.

Information is key. The goal is for diners to become more aware and mindful of their choices in what seafood they consume in restaurants.

To make it a smooth transition for restaurants, Papacosta has some recommendations: “First, you’re going to have to change your menus. There is going to be some signage that you invest in. Second, we need to educate restaurants and caterers. We want to engage with some of your key peak bodies to start offering information. We have a very strong awareness of what alternatives are available. We want to offer as much information to the distributors and the suppliers to make sure that restaurants are being offered all the different range of products. Because a lot of the time, a restaurant or a cafe will only be offered some two or three key products.”

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Between now and 1 July 2026, SIA is tasked with the challenge of getting food service businesses exposed to the plethora of seafood available in Australia, information they don’t usually hear from their usual suppliers. Papacosta believes, “Once the operator has done their research and had a look at what’s out there between the imported and Australian products, then they can make an informed decision.”

SIA suggests it’s time for Australian restaurants to cast a wider net when it comes to seafood offerings: “From a business perspective, once they see what’s available, they then have the opportunity to maybe reset and refresh their menu.” It’s a good time to highlight a particular species and have a conversation with their diners.

“Australian seafood is one of the most diverse in the world. We have hundreds of different species. I think that’s something we should try and celebrate.”

According to Papacosta, from a from a volume perspective about a third of Australia’s seafood products goes to foodservice, a third to domestic retail through retailers and supermarkets, and a third is exported.

The seafood industry directly employs over 10,000 Australians, generating around \$3 billion of gross value to the economy. Knowledge is power. Knowing where their seafood comes from gives Australians power to not only choose what’s on their plate, but also to impact the seafood industry, boost economy and provide more local jobs.

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