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\$40,000 fine levied for falsely labeled "Dolphin Safe" Tuna

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\$40,000 for Falsely Labeled "Dolphin Safe" Tuna

(SAN FRANCISCO) Earth Island Institute's International Marine Mammal Project applauds San Diego federal court action against smugglers bringing Dolores tuna, canned in Mexico, into the US with a phony "Amigo de Delfin" (Dolphin Friendly) label. Salvador Garcia Sandoval, owner of TBA Mexican Trade Grocery of Chula Vista, CA, pleaded guilty to illegally importing more than 1600 cases of tuna. He agreed to pay the US government \$40,000 to make up for lost tax duties and \$1,975 to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries for administrative costs.

"This case sends a warning to all markets and grocers in the US," stated David Phillips, Director of Earth Island. "Falsely labeled tuna hurts dolphins, US consumers, and both US and foreign tuna companies that have adopted legitimate 'Dolphin Safe' tuna fishing practices. American consumers deserve to know whether the tuna they buy was caught by methods that kill dolphins."

Earth Island conducted an investigation of reports of illegal tuna being sold in US supermarkets. Earth Island documented that Dolores tuna, canned in Mazatlan, was being sold as "Dolphin Friendly" in many US stores. Dolores tuna is canned by PINSA, the largest cannery in Mexico, which has a fleet of purse seine boats which chase and net dolphins. More than 7 million dolphins have been killed in the tuna fishery since the late 1950's when the large purse seine nets were first introduced.

Earth Island contacted investigators with NOAA Fisheries, who, in concert with US Customs, caught a truckload of Dolores tuna at the border. The load of tuna was traced to Mexican Trade Grocery.

Sandoval will appear in court before Judge Anthony J. Battaglia for further

sentencing on November 15, 2004. Maximum penalty for fraudulent importation of merchandise is up to 5 years in jail and up to \$250,000 fine. (Criminal Case No. 04cr2293)

NOTE: We are saddened to learn that Brett Schneider, the NOAA Fisheries investigator who developed the case, has passed away. We appreciate his help and efforts to protect dolphins.