

# Seafood News Supply & Trade

## ■ Bill introduced to repeal catfish-inspection law



By [Steven Hedlund](#), *SeafoodSource* editor

08 March, 2011 - U.S. Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and John Coburn (R-Okla.) on Monday introduced legislation that would rescind a measure transferring regulation of domestic and imported catfish from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Attached to the 2008 Farm Bill, the provision charges the USDA with inspecting catfish under the agency's Federal Meat Inspection Act; inspections would be mandatory. Just last month, the agency published the much-anticipated rule for inspecting catfish.

However, nowhere in the provision or the rule does it clarify that the FDA will be relieved of its catfish-inspection duties, meaning two agencies will be responsible for inspecting catfish, according to [critics](#).

Both McCain and Coburn said the provision is aimed at "inhibiting" catfish and catfish-like species such as pangasius from Vietnam and other countries.

The provision "is nothing more than the latest effort by members of Congress serving the special interests of the catfish industry in their home states," said McCain. "A similar protectionist tactic was tried in the 2002 Farm Bill, when many of these same members slipped in language that made it illegal to label Vietnamese catfish (pangasius) as catfish in U.S. retail markets. The intent there was to discourage American consumers from buying Vietnamese catfish products, even though they are virtually indistinguishable from U.S. grown catfish." It didn't work. Vietnamese catfish remain popular with American consumers because it's more affordable and cheaper to produce than domestic catfish.

"Now these special interests are relying on this latest Farm Bill rider to over regulate Vietnamese catfish by, ironically, deeming pangasius a catfish again," he added.

Concluded McCain, "The provision that I'm seeking to repeal is nothing more than a protectionist tactic funded at taxpayers' expense.

If implemented, the proposed USDA regulations will lead to a duplicative, costly and complex overseas inspection program that serves no real purpose but to protect American catfish growers from competition while forcing American consumers to pay more for fish. Not only is the catfish provision ... offensive to our principles of free trade, it flagrantly disregards our Bilateral Trade Agreement and relationship with Vietnam. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.”

Last week, the [Catfish Farmers of America](#) accused the U.S. government of “backpedaling” following a Government Accountability Office report questioning the USD 30 million cost of shifting catfish regulation of catfish from the FDA to the USDA.