US authorities reel in StarKist in canned tuna scandal

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Charlie the Tuna was netted by US authorities as part of a canned tuna price fixing conspiracy, as Korean-owned StarKist was fined up to $100 million

The US crackdown on price fixing has netted another big fish in canned tuna, the Justice Department announced Thursday.

StarKist, whose mascot Charlie the Tuna has long been a fixture in American supermarkets, agreed to plead guilty and pay a fine of up to $100 million for conspiring with other companies to fix prices of canned tuna, the Justice Department announced Thursday.

StarKist representatives engaged in discussions and meetings with other packaged seafood firms to manipulate prices from as early as November 2011 and as late as December 2013, according to a statement.

"The conspiracy to fix prices on these household staples had direct effects on the pocketbooks of American consumers," said US Assistant Attorney General Makan Delrahim.

"All Americans have the right to the benefits of free and open competition—the best goods and services at a price free from collusion."

StarKist, which is owned by South Korean company Dongwon Industries, agreed to cooperate with the investigation. Its exact fine will be determined at a sentencing hearing.

StarKist joined Bumble Bee Foods in pleading guilty in the scam. The Justice Department's announced in May 2017 that it was fining Bumble Bee $25 million for its role in the conspiracy.

A total of six charges have resulted from the crackdown so far, including some executives who propagated the scam, the agency said.

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