



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Fifteenth Session

Agadir, Morocco, 22-26 February 2016

REVIEW OF FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY-RELATED MARKET ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

Executive Summary

This paper reviews the recent developments in food quality and safety and related market access requirements to consumer protection, animal health and certification, FAO's work in relation to scientific advice to the Codex Alimentarius Commission and support to member countries to implement the Codex standards.

Suggested action by the Sub-Committee

- Comment on FAO's work with reference to scientific support to Codex in the standard setting process;
- Provide guidance on future work of FAO in relation to:
 - developing joint FAO/World Health Organization (WHO) technical guidance for implementing the Codex codes of practice specific to bivalve molluscs;
 - technical assistance to member countries to implement Codex standards and guidelines, as well as good practices in aquaculture, traceability, fish handling and processing to improve market access; and
 - disseminating information related to food safety standards, guidelines, certification and harmonization of certification for regulatory requirements.
- Recommend future areas of work, with particular attention to small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, for ensuring food safety based on Codex standards.



INTRODUCTION

1. The Fourteenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade¹ (COFI:FT/XIV) reviewed developments and issues in international market access for fish and fishery products, particularly those relevant to fish and seafood safety, quality, traceability, certification, trade standards and market access. COFI:FT expressed support for FAO's work in providing scientific support for Codex standard setting activities and for its technical assistance to developing countries in capacity building to implement the Codex codes of practice and standards. Further, COFI:FT emphasized that FAO should provide technical assistance to small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in developing countries to improve market access. COFI:FT requested that FAO continue to work in close cooperation with WHO and various committees dealing with fish related issues.
2. COFI:FT/XIV underlined the importance of FAO's capacity building activities on market access and value addition, in particular for small-scale producers and processors in developing countries. Furthermore, COFI:FT/XIV emphasized that FAO should work with other organizations, regional fisheries bodies and community-based organizations to develop and improve the understanding of these standards among stakeholders.
3. COFI:FT/XIV expressed support for FAO's work in developing technical guidance for the development of bivalve molluscan sanitation programs with the WHO for the implementation of Codex codes of practice in relation to bivalve sanitation programmes.
4. COFI:FT/XIV expressed support for FAO's role in coordinating and improving dialogue between importing and exporting countries in order to ensure compliance with food safety requirements that support international trade and requested that FAO continues cooperating with Codex within the framework of World Trade Organization's (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement.
5. The Thirty-first Session of COFI (COFI 31), while endorsing the recommendations of COFI:FT, expressed concern over the proliferation of private standards, certification schemes, and their impact on market access and requested FAO to continue monitoring such schemes and undertake an analysis of their effects on fisheries management and economic returns.
6. The objectives of this paper are to: i) report on recent developments in market access requirements related to consumer protection and certification; ii) describe FAO's activities in this field; and iii) seek the guidance of the Sub-Committee on how to strengthen FAO's work in this area. This agenda item addresses market access issues primarily related to food safety and animal health, while other agenda items will discuss eco-labels and traceability related to combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FISH SAFETY AND QUALITY

7. Fish safety and quality remain the focus of regulatory requirements in international fish trade. Though seafood is generally regarded as a safe food, during the last few years there have been some food safety problems, including large market recalls, reinforcing the need to strengthen food safety management along the entire supply chain. There have been a few instances of import bans as a result of perceived risks (e.g. smoked fish likely to exceed maximum limits of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH)). FAO has been providing member countries with more detailed guidance on issues related to hot smoking techniques in collaboration with academia, although the development of technical guidance in support of the Code of Practice for the Reduction of Contamination of Food with Polycyclic

¹ See COFI:FT/XIV/2014/Inf.4.

Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH) from Smoking and Direct drying processes is needed as a result of changes in the legislation regarding maximum limits of PAH of major importing countries.

8. Bivalve molluscs are an important commodity in international trade. Considering the problems faced by several member countries in implementing bivalve sanitation programmes, FAO ,along with WHO, is working with a core group of experts to develop technical guidance for the development of bivalve molluscan sanitation programmes in line with the Codex Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products. The scope and outline of the technical guidance were presented at a Round Table discussion involving several experts and national competent authorities from several developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, during the 10th International Conference on Molluscan Shellfish Safety held in March, 2015, in Puerto Varas, Chile. The technical guidance was finalized at the end of 2015 for its pilot implementation in the Southern African region in 2016 and 2017, and initiatives have been taken to pilot the technical guidance in Central and South American regions.

9. The WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures encourages member countries to adopt standards, codes of practice and guidelines set by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). FAO, along with WHO, is providing scientific advice to the CAC and disseminating technical information that could help member countries to implement Codex standards and texts. Since COFI:FT/XIV, FAO has been working on a technical paper to explain to member countries matters regarding the application of Toxicity Equivalent Factors (TEF) for biotoxin chemical analogues associated with bivalve mollusc species, as requested by the Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products (CCFFP). “Nitrogen factor” is the average nitrogen content of seafood tissues on a fat-free basis and can be used for the calculation of seafood content in various products. Information on published nitrogen factors for fish under Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), as well as interim factors awaiting confirmation and methodology for determining nitrogen factors, have been made available to users through FAO's website as requested by CCFFP.

10. There have been certain amendments to food safety regulations in major importing countries that may be of interest to exporting countries. In the European Union (Member Organization), there have been amendments to regulations on permissible maximum levels of contaminants such as cadmium and lead in certain categories of fishery products, as well as some amendments to regulations on information provided to consumers and in the regulations on the bivalves sanitation program. The United States Food Safety Modernisation Act introduced the new concept of Hazard Analysis Risk-Based Preventive Control (HARPC), though this may not be applicable to industries already applying Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) based food safety management. Lack of maximum residue limit (MRL) for ethoxyquin in crustaceans was affecting shrimp trade with Japan but this has now changed with the establishment of an MRL.

11. Import refusals and rejection of fishery products resulting from residues of veterinary drugs are still a problem in international fish trade. The problem is partly due to lack of MRLs in Codex with the exception of two antibiotics. Aquaculture involves diverse species and often data required for the establishment of MRLs are limited and available only for few species. The Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in its 25th Session requested the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) to provide an assessment on whether, based on data from one or more fish species, it is possible to establish an MRL for finfish, crustaceans and molluscs in general. This work is ongoing.

FAO ACTIVITIES

12. The FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department has continued its scientific and technical support for its normative work by:

- providing advice to the 33nd Session of the Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products (CCFFP). The 33nd Session made progress by recommending the adoption of the Draft

Standard for fresh and quick frozen raw scallops and performance criteria for reference and confirmatory methods for biotoxins in the Standard for Live and Raw Bivalve Molluscs;

- providing advice to the 44th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH). This Committee is working on the draft Guidelines for the Application of General Principles of Hygiene for control of parasites in food. The guideline has sections covering fish;
- providing advice to the electronic working groups of other committees that deal with fisheries issues, e.g. the Codex Committee on Contaminants is discussing the maximum limits for methylmercury in fish;
- continuing to work on the development of risk analysis tools for use by national governments based on FAO/WHO risk assessment for histamine in fish;
- organizing a coordination meeting with WHO, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) to plan a coordinated action plan to minimise the public health and trade impact of ciguatera fish poisoning;
- supporting the member countries and the private sector in setting policy targets and drawing practical interventions from specific Codex guidelines to meet international standards for hot-smoked fish and fishery products; and
- strengthening partnerships with relevant agencies and academia involved in food safety and value chains to support the fisheries sector.

13. FAO continued its capacity building activities in developing countries in:

- implementing Codex guidelines, codes of practice and standards, and supporting assessment and management of national seafood safety and quality regimes to meet major market requirements and to comply with SPS and technical barriers to trade (TBT) requirements, traceability and certification programmes;
- implementing programmes to reduce post-harvest losses and to add value for different fisheries commodities, particularly those from small-scale fish farmers and fishers, to improve market access;
- developing and disseminating a database on value-added products in international markets and the labelling requirements for these products;
- supporting regional networks of fish inspectors, such as the African Network for Fish Technology and Safety (ANFTS) and the Pan-American Network on fish technology, inspection and quality control;
- organizing training programmes to disseminate market access requirements, lessons learned from trade standard compliance failures in fisheries and aquaculture products, and harmonization of certification requirements;
- organising special sessions at the International Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade (IIFET) Conferences on market access requirements and highlighting problems that result from multiple certification requirements at the IIFET
- implementing regional training programmes that help member countries to handle SPS and TBT issues in the WTO;
- organized jointly with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the International Association of Fish Inspectors (IAFI), the biannual World Seafood Congress, which brings together regulators from major importing countries, fisheries and aquaculture certifying bodies, representatives of the fish processing industry, and fish inspection and certification services from fish exporting countries; and
- supporting the biannual International Conference on Molluscan Shellfish Safety (ICMSS). This Conference is a good forum to update those involved in national fish inspection and certification agencies with scientific developments in the area of sanitary control and biotoxin management. The 2015 ICMSS was used to facilitate a stakeholder consultation on the Technical Guidance for Bivalve Sanitation being developed by FAO and WHO.