

# SEAFOOD TRADE MATTERS

## e-Newsletter

### SafeFish Update February 2014



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## Codex Committee on Fish & Fish Products (CCFFP) Meeting

The Codex Committee for Fish and Fisheries Products (CCFFP) meeting held in Bergen in mid-February was extremely successful, with all major Australian objectives achieved. The SafeFish led preparatory work for the marine biotoxin methods of analysis provisions was recognised by the Chair of CCFFP, who requested that Australia lead an in-session working group to develop this standard further. After lively debate an agreed position was presented to the plenary and accepted. The new section on method criteria for marine biotoxins, if accepted by the Codex Committee on Measurement, Analysis and Sampling, will finalise this standard. The proposed standard recognises the methods currently in use in Australia, whilst allowing flexibility to also use appropriately validated methods that may be developed in the future. It also allows for the adoption of new work on oral toxicities for toxin analogs at a later date without a need to change the standard.

The Scallop Standard was also progressed to step 8 (the final stage). The section on water-added scallops was removed from the standard, in line with the Australian position. The committee also

accepted the Australian position that eviscerated product did not pose a microbiological risk, negating the requirement for microbiological testing. This should aid Australian regulatory authorities to re-consider the requirement of microbiological testing (if present) in current state-based scallop food safety management plans, and will be forwarded to the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Advisory Committee for consideration in the current re-write of the Australian Shellfish Quality Assurance Programs' Procedural Manual.

The Committee agreed to add a section to the Scallop Code of Practice to include short-haul activities typical of Australian scallop fisheries, but previously absent from the Code of Practice. This work will be continued through an electronic working group.

The standard for Histamine was discussed, but agreement could not be reached on an appropriate uncertainty factor, and the potential revision of the maximum allowable level. Terms of reference were set up for an electronic working group to discuss this further, and to review the current guidance in Codex on control of histamines, and sampling plans.

## **Ciguatera in Spanish Mackerel**

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The New South Wales (NSW) Food Authority has recently been advised of four cases of ciguatera poisoning linked to the consumption of Spanish Mackerel caught from Evans Head (mid/far north of NSW coast) and as such has released a fact sheet containing information around the issue for the Seafood Industry ([read more](#)).

Ciguatera poisoning is a form of food poisoning. It is caused by eating warm water finfish that carry ciguatera poison (toxin). Small plant eating fish eat toxic algae and in-turn are eaten by larger predatory fish like Spanish Mackerel. The symptoms of Ciguatera poisoning can be mild to severe, and can occur anywhere from one to twenty-four hours after consuming contaminated products. The most common symptoms include tingling and numbness in fingers, toes, around lips, tongue, mouth and throat, burning or skin pain on contact with cold water, joint and muscle pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and/or abdominal cramps, headache, fatigue and fainting. Unfortunately there is no management processes (such as cooking or freezing) that can remove or destroy the toxin from fish.

Five years ago, the Sydney Fish Market introduced strict guidelines to restrict potentially contaminated fish from being sold at their wholesale auctions ([read more](#)). The guidelines introduced restrictions around maximum size limits for some tropical reef fish taken from known ciguatera hot-spot locations. Following the introduction of these restrictions, the SFM have to date had no known cases of Ciguatera contaminated fish detected. Given the recent notification from the NSW Food Authority, the SFM has amended their guidelines around Mackerel to introduce a new maximum size of 10kg from product caught from NSW and Queensland.

## Scombroid Fish Poisoning

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The recent food safety incident in Bali where tragically two people died, most likely as a result of Scombroid Fish Poisoning associated with a seafood meal, highlights the need to understand and manage food safety risks in all seafood businesses. Scombroid Fish Poisoning is caused by ingestion of histamine, a product of the degradation of the amino acid histidine. Histidine is found in the muscles of some fish species and can be degraded to histamine by enzymatic action of some naturally occurring bacteria.

SafeFish are committed to assisting the Australian Seafood industry to better understand the food safety risks of Scombroid Fish Poisoning to their businesses, and as such have put together the following resources:

- Histamine (Scombroid) Poisoning Fact Sheet ([read more](#))
- Scombroid Fish Poisoning: Essential Knowledge for Seafood Businesses ([read more](#))

As detailed in the Codex section above, histamine risk management guidelines are currently being reviewed by the Codex Committee of Fish and Fishery Products, and a terms of reference for an electronic working group to discuss this issue further has been set up. SafeFish will assist the Australian delegation in this process. If you have expertise or experience in this area, and would like to be involved in this process please contact [natalie.dowsett@sa.gov.au](mailto:natalie.dowsett@sa.gov.au).