



COMMUNIQUE

SafeFish held its quarterly meeting in Melbourne on Wednesday 9th October 2019, chaired by Dr. Anne Astin. The meeting included participants from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, the New Zealand Seafood Industry Association, representatives from Australian seafood industry sectors (wholesale, processing, import and export fields), and researchers. Highlights of the topics discussed and the decisions made can be found below:

1. 2020-2021 SafeFish technical work program

To address the issues identified as high priority from the SafeFish prioritization workshop, the secretariat scoped and costed five technical research project concepts. These were discussed in detail and based on this extensive input from partners, stakeholders and members the SafeFish work program for the 2019 to 2021 financial period was agreed. Details of the projects that will be undertaken are as follows:

- a) Facilitation of an Australian/New Zealand review of the microbiological criteria relating to seafood in the Food Standards Code to remove all process hygiene matters from the criteria and to include these in a separate guidance document for industry. The aim is to ensure the criteria are fit for purpose for the current risk-based preventative approach to food safety management. The review will be science based and fully consultative to ensure that the changes to the standard and the guidance document appropriately meet the needs and requirements of the Australian/New Zealand seafood industries. The process will begin with a workshop open to all interested parties, with further opportunities for input provided during the development of the recommendations and guidance documents.
- b) In order to better understand and manage the emerging risk of vibriosis in the shellfish industry, SafeFish will review all Australian cases relating to vibrios in bivalve seafood and incorporate this information into a note for publication in the Journal for Communicable Disease Intelligence. In addition, given the critical food safety risk potential, SafeFish will also investigate the potential to include vibriosis as a notifiable disease in all states (not just some as currently occurs). This needs further and careful consideration related to the impact of the approach, particularly to improve industry, researcher and regulator understanding for implementing best-practice risk management. A significant event to ensure this happens will be a workshop that SafeFish will facilitate with industry and other interested parties that will include international experts.
- c) To improve risk management of Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFP) in Australia, SafeFish will raise awareness of CFP in Australian health care workers (General Practitioners (GP), Environmental Health Officers, Health Departments), First we will conduct an online survey to gauge the current understanding of ciguatera, generate awareness of the issue and offer participants the chance to propose their preferred format for awareness/promotional materials. Targeted materials would then be prepared and distributed and a report detailing survey results prepared for a GP journal (Communicable Diseases or similar). Better reporting is an initial step to improve the understanding of CFP, identify hot spots, and assist in research to provide risk management awareness.

2. Update on current SafeFish projects

a) *Biotxin Harmonisation application to FSANZ*

An assessment of the regulatory impact for proposed changes to include Paralytic Shellfish Toxins (PST) and Diarrhetic Shellfish Toxin (DST) maximum limits in the Food Standards Code and to align with Codex was conducted by SafeFish, and presented to ASQAAC at its annual meeting in August 2019. ASQAAC voted to progress the submission to FSANZ to request the changes proposed. The FSANZ submission will be completed by the end of 2019.

b) *Microplastics in Seafood*

Preliminary findings from the joint project with Adelaide University have indicated the presence of microplastics in a high proportion of Australian fish samples analysed to date. There is still no evidence to suggest that this has impacts on human health, and SafeFish is working closely with the University of Adelaide to ensure that this message is communicated concurrently with these findings. A fact sheet has recently been prepared to detail the current research on microplastics that is occurring in Australia and New Zealand in Seafood, and international opinion on food safety related to microplastics in seafood.

c) *Ciguatera Research Strategy*

The national Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFP) research strategy has been completed and is available to [download here](#). A number of positive research developments have already begun as a follow on from this work, including confirmation that QLD is rewriting its General Practitioner (GP) guidelines and reviewing the current CFP definition, as well as trialing a ciguatera questionnaire (which if successful will be rolled out to all states in early 2020).

3. Codex update

SafeFish has provided input to Codex on a number of items of interest to the seafood industry. The [full Codex report](#) can be found on the SafeFish website and details specific input provided in relation to the following matters:

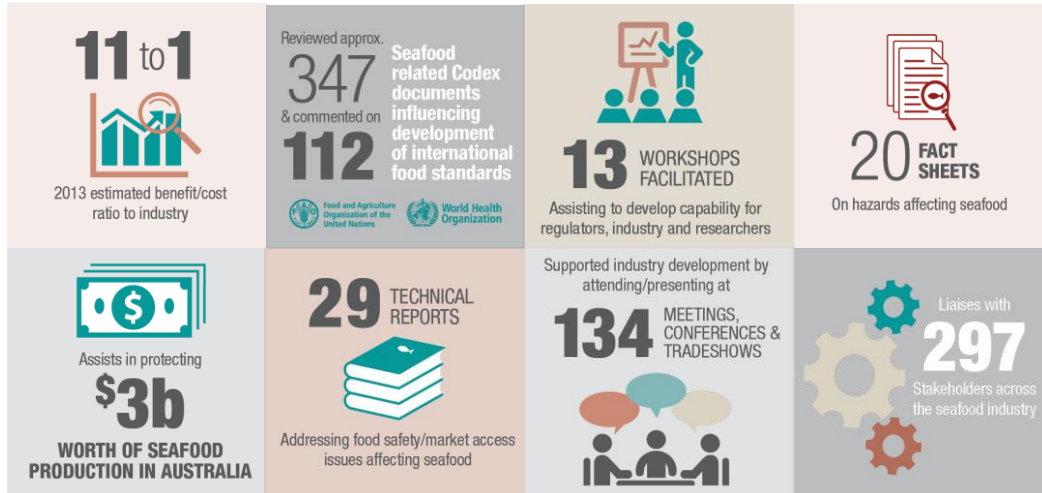
- Histamine - Update on sampling plans and harmonisation of Histamine control guidance
- Methylmercury – Sampling plans and maximum levels in other species
- Ciguatoxins - Ad-Hoc FAO/WHO expert meeting on Ciguatera
- Lead - Discussions on Maximum levels of lead in seafood
- Food Fraud - Now on the Codex agenda
- Guidance on the management of biological foodborne outbreaks
- Updates to Korean import requirements

4. Collaboration between STAG/SafeFish

The STAG has been formally appointed as a SafeFish partner to enable increased collaboration and communication between the two entities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is currently being prepared to detail the relationships, roles and requirements of each party to the MOU to formalise the arrangement that is intended to deliver more coherent services to benefit the industry while reducing costs and duplication. The SafeFish team is looking forward to working more closely with the STAG to assist the Australian seafood industry.

5. 10 years of SafeFish

The secretariat is excited to announce that in 2020 SafeFish will be celebrating its 10-year anniversary. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners, funders, stakeholders and collaborators over the decade who have supported us along the way. To begin our celebrations, we have compiled a snapshot for what we have achieved over the last decade:



6. Invitation to attend or present at the March meeting

The next SafeFish meeting will be held in March 2020. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity for our many stakeholders to attend and engage with partners and other key industry, research and government members. We welcome contributions from our many members to present or to table discussions related to matters they or their sector are facing, areas of interest or specific expertise they can offer. If you would like to attend or present at our next meeting planned for March 2020, please contact the [secretariat](#).

Meetings are now open to observers. Interested parties should contact the SafeFish secretariat to register their attendance.

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