



## SafeFish Update

April – June 2020 inclusive

Given the restrictions in travel and changes to some activities during the COVID 19, the SafeFish Secretariat has collated the following update for stakeholders to keep them aware of our continuing activities. Whilst some projects involving workshops and close interaction with public health departments have been put on hold (vibrio and ciguatera), other activities are continuing via Zoom (review of the seafood microbiological criteria in the Food Standards Code and the biotoxin harmonization submission to FSANZ). We have continued assisting direct enquiries from the seafood industry and regulators. The SafeFish website has been a valuable resource during this period, with 873 users visiting, and 2654 pageviews between Jan and June.

The next SafeFish meeting will be held **via Zoom on Friday the 24<sup>th</sup> July**, with a shortened agenda. We will welcome Veronica Papacosta from Seafood Industry Australia as a SafeFish partner, focus on activities for the remaining year of funding and determine the scope and funding potential for an extension for SafeFish from 2021-2024. Dr. Anne Astin has successfully chaired SafeFish for the past 6 years, guiding our direction, improving our governance and providing important national linkages in the food safety arena. Anne's term will end in June 2021, so we will also discuss the process of finding a replacement Chair.

## Table of Contents

<b>1. Codex update .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Upcoming Codex Meetings.....</i>	3
<i>Methylmercury – Maximum levels in other fish species and sampling plans.....</i>	3
<i>Diflubenzuron in Salmon .....</i>	3
<i>Canned Sardine-type products .....</i>	3
<i>Chinese National Food Safety Standards .....</i>	3
<b>2. Project updates .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Vibrio risk reduction in bivalve molluscan shellfish .....</i>	4
<i>Review of the microbiological standards relating to seafood in the FSANZ Food Standards Code .....</i>	4
<i>Ciguatera awareness strategy.....</i>	5
<i>Biotoxin Harmonisation Application to Food Standards Australia .....</i>	5
<i>Microplastics in Seafood .....</i>	5
<i>New Project: US Market Access for bivalve shellfish .....</i>	5
<i>SafeFish Website Statistics .....</i>	5
<b>3. Communications, Enquiries, Meetings and Workshops .....</b>	<b>6</b>

## **1. Codex update**

### **Upcoming Codex Meetings**

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the schedule of Codex sessions for 2020 and has forced the Codex Alimentarius Commission to explore different ways of maintaining the momentum of the Codex standard setting work. Whilst physical meetings have been/will be rescheduled, General Subject and Commodity Committees remain active through their electronic working groups (EWGs). SafeFish does not consider there are foreseeable or ongoing risk exposures for Australia's seafood industries as the result of these changes. SafeFish will continue to monitor risks and exercise due diligence on behalf of partners and the industry.

### **Methylmercury – Maximum levels in other fish species and sampling plans**

The Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF) has released a discussion paper to consider establishing maximum levels (MLs) of methylmercury in Orange Roughy and Cusk-eels. The discussion paper also identifies other species or taxonomic groupings for which MLs could be derived, specifically anglerfish (*Lophius* sp.), snake mackerel (*Gempylidae* sp.), toothfish (*Dissostichus* sp.), sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*), catfish (*Siluriformes* sp.) and greenling (Hexagrammidae). Sampling plans for methylmercury will continue to be developed within EWGs and there is also a suggestion that a literature review could be undertaken to consider potential risk management recommendations for methylmercury in fish at the catch, sorting and processing levels.

SafeFish approached the National Residue Survey to seek the feasibility of being able to obtain and upload total mercury and methylmercury concentrations into the GEMS Food Contaminants database. It was indicated however, that the data could not be made available to be uploaded onto a public website. SafeFish has continued to engage with the toothfish sector on the developments and provided guidance surrounding uploading internal data to the GEMS Food Contaminants database.

### **Diflubenzuron in Salmon**

Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods (CCRVDF) are considering establishing a maximum residue limit (MRL) for diflubenzuron in salmon at 10ug/kg. This follows a recent JECFA recommendation. FSANZ currently have a temporary MRL of 2ug/kg for diflubenzuron in fish muscle. SafeFish has advised the Tasmanian Salmonid Growers Association on the proposal.

### **Canned Sardine-type products**

Codex has received a proposal to amend the Codex Standard for Canned Sardines and Sardine-Type Products to include *Sardinella lemuru* (Scaly Mackerel) in the list of designated species. SafeFish engaged with representatives from WAFIC and the South Australian Sardine Industry Association of the proposal and provided a submission to Codex Australia.

### **Chinese National Food Safety Standards**

On 12 May 2020 the People's Republic of China issued several SPS notifications that proposed amendments to the following existing standards:

- GB 2762-2017 - Maximum Levels of Contaminants in Foods

- GB 29921-2013 – Pathogenic Microorganism Limits in Food
- GB 7718-2011 - General Principles for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods
- GB XXXX-XXXX – Pathogen limits for ready-to-eat food in bulk (NEW STANDARD)

SafeFish reviewed unofficial translations of the notification and compiled a document that compared the proposed limits to existing limits. The notifications and comparative document were sent to all SafeFish stakeholders and uploaded to our website. The main proposed changes for fish and fishery products were:

- Aligning the MLs for methylmercury in tuna, marlin, shark, alfonso to Codex. Current maximum levels for methylmercury remain for all other aquatic animals and their products
- Reduction of PCBs in all aquatic products
- Removal of *Staphylococcus aureus* limits in pre-packaged foods
- Inclusion of *Listeria monocytogenes* limits in raw ready-to-eat aquatic products

## 2. Project updates

### **Vibrio risk reduction in bivalve molluscan shellfish**

This project was put on hold during COVID 19 as it relied on a face-to-face workshop for industry and regulators.

Discussions have resumed between SafeFish, Oysters Tasmania and ASQAAC on the possibility of holding the workshop this calendar year, and are focused on determining the most advantageous time and place to maximise participation.

### **Review of the microbiological standards relating to seafood in the FSANZ Food Standards Code**

Rather than delay this review, the consultant (Dr John Sumner), SafeFish secretariat and Seafood New Zealand have been continuing in a series of focused Zoom workshops. Two workshops have occurred thus far with the expectation a further two will be facilitated by the end of August. The outcomes of the workshops will be to produce guidance to FSANZ on potential microbiological criteria that could be moved from the Food Standards Code into a compendium and suggest draft wording for the compendium to support improved food safety outcomes. FSANZ will consider the guidance, and circulate any potential changes broadly for further comment, as per their normal procedures.

The first workshop examined the definition of ready-to-eat food. Good input was received from both the New Zealand and Australian workshops, with 20 participants from New Zealand and 24 participants from Australia. Both workshops found the ready-to-eat definition was ambiguous in terms of dealing with product that may have been produced and entered the supply chain with the intent for cooking, but was later used as if it was a ready-to-eat product, e.g. raw fish products being used for sushi, sashimi, poke or ceviche. A new definition was drafted. Both groups agreed that the listeria component of the current definition should be transferred to the listeria section of the Code, to enable the definition to be consistent across the whole code (currently the definition in Chapter 3 is different to that for Chapter 1).

The second focused on the criteria for standard plate counts and *Staphylococcus aureus* in cooked and raw Crustacea. All agree these were process control criteria, that should be removed to the

Compendium. Both Australian and New Zealand import standards have either removed or are in the process of removing these criteria, and would not be impacted by this suggested change.

Workshop 3 will cover bivalves (*E. coli* standard, and a discussion of the best way to deal with risks from viruses and *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*), *Salmonella*, and *Listeria*, whilst workshop 4 will focus on drafting guidance for the Compendium.

### **Ciguatera awareness strategy**

#### *a) Health Care worker survey*

Epidemiologist Clémence Gatti has agreed to facilitate the development of the Australian health care worker survey and provided a copy of a similar survey previously conducted in French Polynesia. Otherwise limited progress due to COVID.

#### *b) Recreational fishermen*

The article on ciguatera fish poisoning initially written for the April edition of the BlueWater magazine (Game Fishing Association of Australia) will now not be published until later in the year, when the magazine goes back into print. In the meantime, a short teaser article will be published in their bimonthly online segment (temporary replacement for the full print magazine).

### **Biotoxin Harmonisation Application to Food Standards Australia**

The submissions to FSANZ to review the criteria in the Food Standards Code for diarrhetic and paralytic shellfish toxins in bivalve molluscs to bring them into alignment with Codex have been compiled on FSANZ templates. They have been sent to FSANZ for comment prior to formal submission.

### **Microplastics in Seafood**

Analysis of samples for this project have now been almost completed and it has been determined that the plastic load detected in all species of seafood tested has been low. This is a very good news story for the industry, and SafeFish will now work with the University of Adelaide to compile talking points around the positive findings, as well as an infographic to detail the results. The draft final report for FSANZ is due at the end of June and the final steering group committee meeting to discuss dissemination of the findings and future work will be held prior to the end of the project (late August).

### **New Project: US Market Access for bivalve shellfish**

Whilst the outcome of the proposal to the Package Assisting Small Exporters (PASE) grant scheme is still pending, SafeFish has seen continued queries from industry on accessing the US Market. New South Wales has indicated a desire to co-fund work to demonstrate equivalence of microbial methods used in Australia to those used in the US. SafeFish has been examining the current methods in use in each state to determine

1. The types of methods in use
2. The difference between these and the stipulated methods in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (US)
3. If any previous equivalency studies have been conducted that could meet US requirements.

### **SafeFish Website Statistics**

For the period of January to June 2020 the SafeFish website has seen the following:

- 2654 page views, with the ASQAP Manual, the Technical Program page and 'Issues currently relevant at Codex' section being the top three pages visited.
- There has been 873 users, of which, 88% are new and 12% returning users to the site
- The top 5 hits demographically of users has been from the US, Australia, Great Britain, China and France

### 3. Communications, Enquiries, Meetings and Workshops

During COVID 19, SafeFish attendance at meetings and workshops has been reduced. SafeFish has produced the following outputs:

- Input into the FRDC briefing on Coronavirus and the seafood industry
- Support to SFM responses to two media issues – i) advice on how to handle media around the potential risk of illness from Australian fish markets and ii) information to defend against media suggesting that viruses in Australian fish can be transferred to humans through consumption.
- Summaries of the two workshops on the FSANZ review of seafood related microbiological criteria in the Food Standards Code to attendees.
- Responded to 11 stakeholder enquiries; four in relation to Codex activities, four dealing with US market access; two from the developing bivalve shellfish industry in WA; one on abalone food safety standards; and one on neurotoxic shellfish toxin analysis methods.
- SafeFish is working with STAG and SIA on an emergency response to the COVID testing of product in China.
- The SafeFish general information brochure has been re-designed and is currently being re-printed. This is an important tool for providing new stakeholders with information about who we are and what we do and is commonly distributed at conferences and meetings. If you would like copies to keep on hand or to distribute, please contact the [secretariat](#) to arrange for some to be sent to you.

Veronica Pappacosta is the interim CEO of the Seafood Industry Association and will attend SafeFish meetings in future.

The team at SafeFish would like to wish you and your families the very best in this difficult and uncertain time. As always, SafeFish will continue to provide services on behalf of the seafood industry, our members and investors to continue to assure consumers of the safety and quality of Australia's seafood. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us if there is anything that we can do to assist you or your organizations.