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**SEAFOOD SAFETY: AN ATTEMPT FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN EXPORTING AND
IMPORTING COUNTRIES**

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This paper has been prepared by Mr. Nobuyuki Yagi of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Tokyo, Japan.

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For further information, please contact:
Carl-Christian SCHMIDT (E-mail: carl-christian.schmidt@oecd.org)

JT03205663

SEAFOOD SAFETY: AN ATTEMPT FOR COORDINATION BETWEEN EXPORTING AND IMPORTING COUNTRIES¹

Background

1. Major importing markets for fish and fishery products exist in developing countries. The value of internationally traded fish and fishery products amounted to more than \$68 billion² in 2003. Of this, the share of developed countries was approximately \$56 billion, or 82% of the total. At the same time, developing countries exported around half of the fish and fishery products which are internationally traded. Approximately 48% of the fish and fishery products traded were exported from developed countries in 2003³.

2. These exporting partners in developing nations may have difficulty coping with some of the new food safety requirements imposed by importing nations, even though such requirements are based on international standards. Lack of knowledge or resources on the part of developing countries, in terms of monitoring and controlling seafood safety, can cause bottlenecks. A potential mismatch in the awareness levels between producers in developing countries and consumers in developed countries can be also recognized. Close dialogue and coordination between producing and consuming countries could contribute to avoiding troubles in this area.

3. In this paper, Japan's attempts at coordination with its major exporting partners in Southeast Asia will be presented.

Significance of Southeast Asian Region in Seafood Exports

4. The Southeast Asian region plays a significant role in providing seafood for the Japanese market. In 2004, Japan imported a total value of JPY 1 637 billion⁴ (about USD 15 billion) of fish and fishery products from around 100 countries and regions worldwide. The share of the 10 ASEAN countries accounted for USD 2.9 billion, or around 20% of the total value of fish and fishery products imported by Japan in 2004. Shrimp and prawns are the most frequently traded items according to these statistics.

Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)

5. Japan is providing technical and financial support for this region through various means. One form of support is implemented through an assistance program for the SEAFDEC. SEAFDEC is an autonomous intergovernmental body established as a regional treaty organization in 1967 to promote fisheries development in Southeast Asia. Its central office is located in Bangkok, Thailand. SEAFDEC

¹ This paper has been prepared by Mr. Nobuyuki YAGI, Fisheries Agency; 1-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8907

² Data Source: The FAO FISHSTAT

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Data Source: Trade Statistics of Japan by Ministry of Finance

aims specifically to develop the fishing sector potentials in the region through training, research and information services to improve the food supply by rational utilization and development of fisheries resources⁵.

6. SEAFDEC is currently made up of 11 Member Countries, namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.⁶ Its services range over a number of areas, including fishing gear technology, marine engineering, fishing ground surveys and stock assessment and post-harvest technology, as well as the development and improvement of aquaculture techniques.⁷

7. Japan provides regular financial contributions to SEAFDEC to assist the organization in its activities. Japan's total annual contribution has amounted to around USD 2 million per year during the past several years.

Specific Programs at SEAFDEC Related to Seafood Safety

8. SEAFDEC is engaged in several programs related to food safety, with financial support from Japan. These programs include

- Capacity Building for Testing Chloramphenicol and Nitrofurans Residues in Aquaculture Fish and Fish Products
- Seafood Safety Information Network
- Application of HACCP in the Fish Processing Industry in Southeast Asia

9. The first program, "Chloramphenicol and Nitrofurans Residues in Aquaculture Fish and Fish Products" was implemented from January 2004 to March 2005. Under Japan's Food Sanitation Law, manufacturing, importing, processing, preparing, using, or selling food that contains antibiotic substances, including chloramphenicol and nitrofurans, are all prohibited. The EU and USA apparently make similar requirements of their trading partners.

10. In contrast, most laboratories in Southeast Asia did not have the capacity to detect chloramphenicol and nitrofurans residues in 2002.⁸ A project was designed to enable SEAFDEC to build the capacity for chloramphenicol and nitrofurans residue testing so that SEAFDEC would be effective in conducting training courses for its member countries. To set up capabilities for determining the presence of chloramphenicol and nitrofurans even at the very low levels of 0.1 to 0.3 ppb, SEAFDEC staff were sent for training in Japan for 8 weeks. Subsequently, the skills and knowledge obtained were transferred to other regional laboratories via publications and regional training programs. SEAFDEC has informed us that the member countries recognized that mastering and developing detection methods using sophisticated instruments like LC-MS-MS could be a challenge to them, especially developing methods to detect low contamination levels⁹. Continuation of a similar project is planned in this area.

⁵ <http://www.seafdec.org/aboutus.htm>

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Report of the Japanese Trust Fund Project" SEAFDEC 2005

⁹ *Ibid.*

11. The second program of the “Seafood Safety Information Network” was implemented from September 2003 to December 2004. It aimed at establishing a network of regional experts and institutions working in the area of seafood safety. The project involved establishing a database on chemical, drug and pesticide residues and toxicity in fish and fish products and their environment. Regional technical consultations were also held. A new website (www.fishsafetyinfo.com) was created for easy access to the information.

12. The third program, “The Application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) in the Fish Processing Industry in Southeast Asia” was implemented from January 2000 to December 2003. This project was developed to assist Southeast Asian countries to further promote the implementation of HACCP in their fish processing industries, not only for export markets but also for their traditional fish producers, which cater mainly to the domestic market¹⁰.

13. Regional workshops were hosted under this program to allow the relevant government experts to share their countries’ experience and information on HACCP implementation. Participants were also trained on HACCP auditing and verification procedures, techniques, and requirements. Several study trips were organized to visit production facilities and government inspection centers in Southeast Asia. Training in pesticide analysis for laboratory staff members was also conducted. According to the SEAFDEC report, a very strong commitment to improve safety and quality was developed through this program.¹¹

Discussion

14. It can be argued that there exists a need for greater policy coherence between exporting and importing countries in the field of seafood safety. The Southeast Asian region has various traditional small and medium scale fisheries. These traditional fisheries and processors would generally require greater assistance to implement HACCP or other food safety requirements, as they tend to lack the technical and financial resources available to larger exporting companies. Special attention is needed to alleviate hardship for small and medium scale traditional entities in this area. In addition to private sector activities, further need exists for capacity building in the government sector in the domain of seafood safety inspection and control in these developing countries.

15. As shown above, several initiatives are implemented in the Southeast Asian region through SEAFDEC. The above programs have been completed as they have achieved their initial objectives. Follow-up projects are also planned and some of them are already implemented. The areas of such projects include regional survey of heavy metals (such as cadmium, lead, and total mercury), pesticides and PCB in fish and fish products and their environment. Continued opportunities to facilitate the collaboration between the importing country (Japan) and exporting countries (ASEAN) would be important.

16. The above efforts should also preferably be extended to other major areas of seafood suppliers. Various bilateral programs are ongoing between Japan and developing countries in other regions. It can also be argued that a need for policy coherence between exporting and importing countries exists not only in the trade in fish and fishery products but also in ensuring sustainable resource exploitation and utilization. Continued implementation on these programs could contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of resources.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

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