

SafeFish Prioritisation Workshop 2019

Every three years SafeFish reviews its technical work program in order to help provide the best outcomes for the seafood industry. The review involves identifying existing and emerging food safety, trade and market access issues and prioritising them to form a new work program. Similar processes have been facilitated in 2011, 2014 and 2016. The review raises awareness of issues of importance to the seafood industry with funders; forms a priority listing for future SafeFish work; and encourages researchers and funders to address the issues.

The objectives of the current review were to:

- Scan all food safety and trade and market access issues impacting, or likely to impact, the Australian seafood industry (both current and emerging)
- Rank these risks against a set of agreed criteria
- Determine the work program for SafeFish from the list of issues identified as a high priority.

The following sources/resources were examined to identify likely food safety and trade and market issues:

- Issues identified from the 2016 SafeFish prioritisation process
- Interrogation of the SafeFish database of direct enquiries for potential concerns
- Direct contact with the seafood industry and stakeholders
- OzFoodNet – Epidemiological data
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) – Food recall data
- Department of Agriculture (DA) – National Residue Survey program
- Department of Agriculture (DA) – Import Testing program
- Department of Agriculture (DA) – Trade detects (export)
- Department of Agriculture (DA) – Trade recall data (export)
- Codex Alimentarius Commission
- European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) – Emerging Risks Exchange Network reports
- EFSA Scientific Network for risk assessment of nanotechnologies in food and feed
- European Union Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF).

Summary of issues identified

The issues identified were compiled and collated into three categories: suitable for consideration by SafeFish during the prioritisation process (listed below); suitable as potential education and training activities; or removed from further consideration. Any issues that were removed from further consideration were generally as a result of being non-specific, not a food safety or trade and market access issue, or currently being dealt with by another agency.

The issues or hazards that were suitable for consideration by SafeFish in the 2019 prioritisation process where:

- Better understanding of risks associated with the consumption of raw seafood in Australia
- Ciguatera fish poisoning
- Development of a tropical oyster industry in northern Australia
- Food fraud and food authenticity

- Harmful algal blooms (HABs) and their impact on seafood – non-traditional vectors of paralytic shellfish toxins
- Lead in seafood (excluding fish)
- Review of the microbiological criteria relating to seafood in the Food Standards Code
- Seafood Industry Response Plans
- Vibrio species in bivalve seafood

The issue of microplastics in seafood was also raised as an emerging issue, however it was removed from consideration as there is currently work underway in this area to determine its prevalence in Australian seafood. In addition to this, the FAO technical paper #615 '[Microplastics in fisheries and Aquaculture](#)' and an EFSA report '[Presence of microplastics and nanoplastics in food, with a particular focus on seafood](#)' concluded that whilst this issue is an increasing trend, the exposure to contaminants through seafood is negligible compared to other sources.

Prioritisation Workshop



The prioritisation workshop was held at South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) Adelaide on 25th July 2019, included SafeFish partners and funders and was independently facilitated by Belinda Cay from AgCommunicators Pty. Ltd.

Details on the issues was collated into a report for the participants to provide background information and context. At the workshop, the issues were individually ranked on a specific risk matrix for likelihood and consequence. The matrix contained the following risk categories and each was given a ranking score between 1 to 25; very high risk (1), high risk (2-6), medium risk (7-15), and low risk (16-25):

- Trade and Market Access
- Public Health
- Regulatory Impacts
- Economic Impacts
- Reputational Impacts (media and political)

- Environmental and Sustainability Issues

The final session of the workshop discussed the potential projects and research that could be undertaken to address the issues identified as high priority.

Results:

Seven issues were determined as 'high' priority. These were organised into emerging and current threats as follows:

Emerging issues:

1. Better understanding of risk associated with the consumption of raw seafood in Australia
2. Tropical oyster industry in the Northern Territory
3. Review of the microbiological criteria relating to seafood in the Food Standards Code
4. Vibrio in bivalve seafood

Current issues:

1. Ciguatera fish poisoning
2. Harmful Algal Blooms in non-traditional vectors
3. Seafood Incident Response Plan

Food fraud and food authenticity was ranked as a medium priority, and lead in seafood was ranked as a low priority issue.

In the final session of the workshop, the participants discussed potential project ideas/research that could be undertaken for the issues. It was noted that a SIRP application was currently being developed for funding through FRDC and the IPA's, work was currently underway to raise awareness of HABs in non-traditional vectors, and the development of the tropical oyster industry in the Northern Australia was identified as mostly extension work to be undertaken in collaboration with ASQAAC.

It was also noted that the FSANZ review on micro criteria in the Food Standards Code will impact all seafood and many stakeholders have already indicated interest in this area; following the recent development of the national strategy for ciguatera, momentum has been built in this field bringing together diverse stakeholders and it was agreed that SafeFish should take advantage of this; the recent listeria deaths and the current confusion around supply chains for seafood that is going to be consumed raw, was concerning; as were the current illnesses associated with vibrios in bivalves and the potential increase in this due to development of the tropical oyster industry. Based on these discussions, the following issues were identified as the highest research priorities for SafeFish:

- **Review of the microbiological criteria relating to seafood in the Food Standards Code**
- **Better understanding of risk associated with the consumption of raw seafood in Australia**
- **Ciguatera fish poisoning**
- **Vibrio in bivalve seafood**

The full report on the prioritisation process and workshop can be requested from SafeFish at info@safefish.com.au.