

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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Agenda Item 8

CX/FFP 05/27/9

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS

Twenty-seventh Session
Cape Town, South Africa
28 February – 4 March 2005

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR SMOKED FISH GOVERNMENT COMMENTS AT STEP 3¹ (Australia, Brazil, European Community, New Zealand, South Africa, United States)

AUSTRALIA

1. Scope

The scope is limited to ready-to-eat (RTE) product, which seems reasonable given that there are common food safety issues arising for hot- and cold-smoked RTE products that do not apply to e.g. hot-smoked cod that requires cooking.

2. Description

2.2: Storage is not permitted above 5°C (for safety reasons) or between –18°C and –3°C (presumably for quality reasons). Australia questions the need for the latter restriction.

2.2: Australia questions the need for the paragraph on microbial hazards. It is at least misplaced, but Australia suggests it be deleted as the material is adequately covered in subsection 5.6.

3. Essential composition and quality factors

3.1: Australia has a preference for the term ‘visibly’ over ‘obviously’, but there is a need to reference the Annex 4 method for determination of the presence of visible parasites.

3.6: This subsection is not required. The histamine requirement in subsection 5.7 is sufficient (and the two subsections do not align, in any case). The histamine limit in subsection 5.7 is consistent with Australian national law.

4. Food additives

Additives should be aligned with other appropriate Codex standards for fish. Any move toward a “no additive” approach is opposed.

5. Hygiene and handling

5.1: Australia suggests retention of the text in the first square brackets (“It is recommended that the”) and deletion of “shall” in the second square brackets. If it is obligatory to follow Codes of Practice then they are, in effect, Standards.

6. Labelling

6.3: This subsection appears to be a quality requirement, not a food safety issue, and is not necessary.

¹ In reply to CL2004/43-FFP

BRAZIL

Brazil suggests the following text to item 2.1 – Product Definition:

Smoked fish is prepared from fresh or frozen gutted fish treated with smoke.

Brazil suggests including the word “gutted” because gutting step decrease the risk of *Clostridium botulinum* growing since we consider that some countries cannot assure low temperatures in all steps of the food chain and most countries cannot assure low temperatures of the product in consumers’ house.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

General comments

The European Community (EC) supports in general terms the “Proposed Draft Standard for Ready to Eat Smoked Fish” and thanks the Committee and the Working Group led by Denmark for the work done.

This work is particularly welcomed in view of the increasing trade problems of smoked fish and in particular those affecting public health.

However, the European Community would like to submit the following comments:

2. DESCRIPTION

Point 2.1 Product Definition

- The smoked fish should be easily recognised by the consumer and therefore it is proposed: to complete the definition by adding the following wording: “*It should have smoked sensory characteristic*”

Point 2.2 Process Definition

- *Listeria* is one of the most important microbiological hazards in smoked fish. It may create sanitary problems, but it could also jeopardize the trade. Therefore, it is proposed to introduce a mention to *Listeria* in the last paragraph.

3. ESSENTIAL COMPOSITION AND QUALITY FACTORS

Point 3.1 The Raw Material

- In order to be consistent with the Draft Standard for Salted Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat, the EC proposes to delete the term “*visibly*” between brackets in the second sentence.

Point 3.4 Liquid Smoke

- The EC would like to add to the existing text: ‘*.....approved for food use.*’

Point 3.6 Decomposition

- The EC agrees with the proposed text consistent with other fish Codex Standards and therefore proposes to delete the brackets and maintain the sentence.

5. HYGIENE AND HANDLING

Point 5.1 Codes of Practices

- The current version of recommended International Code of Practice – General Principles of Food Hygiene is CAC/RCP 1-1969, rev. 4, 2003.

Point 5.2 Microbiological criteria

- There is a mistake in the number of the Code referred in this point. It should be CAC/GL 21-1997 as CAC/RCP 21 (1979) is a document entitled Foods for Infants and Children.

Point 5.4 Parasites

- The presence of live parasites in fish may represent a risk for public health. Therefore the EC proposes the following wording for the first sentence:
- “Smoke fish products shall not contain living parasites, which present a risk for human health (e.g. larvae of nematode).”

6. LABELLING

Point 6.1.1 Name of the Food

- To be consistent with points 2.2 and 3.4, it is suggested to delete the brackets and maintain the sentence: “*Where liquid smoke is used it must be declared on the label.*”
- Point 6.2 Storage instructions
- To complete the sentence by adding the following words at the end: “*such as temperature and shelf life*”.
- Point 6.3 Labelling of Retail Packages
- The EC agrees in principal with the proposal and therefore would propose to delete the brackets. However EC reserves its final opinion and the possibility to require the inclusion of additional information in the labelling, as far as the present proposal for standard is being developed.

7. SAMPLING, EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS

Point 7.4 Determinations of Dead Parasites

- To be consistent with the title of Annex IV it is proposed to change the wording of the title and in the paragraph: “*Determination of the presence of visible parasites.*”

8. DEFINITION OF DEFECTIVES

Defective serves to the acceptance of the lot as provided in point 9. Point 9 refers to the Codex Standard 233-1969 to define the total number of defectives which may make a lot acceptable or not.

Since point 2.1 of Codex Stan 233-169 provides “They are not intended however, to cover factors which may represent a hazard to health or which are unwholesome or otherwise highly objectionable to the consumer on the basis of which responsible authorities would reject the lot”, the EC proposes to only keep under point 8 those defectives affecting the quality and not the safety. Therefore:

Point 8.1 Microbiological defects

- should be deleted, and

Point 8.3 Parasites

- In order to be consistent with the Draft Standard for Salted Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat (ALINORM 04/27/18, Appendix II), the EC proposes replacing the sentence by:
“The presence of readily visible parasites in a sample of the edible portion of the sample unit detected by normal visual inspection of the fish flesh (see Annex 4).”

ANNEXES

It is proposed to include a new Annex related to *Listeria*, in the same line as the current Annex I related to *Clostridium*. This new annex should be drafted taking into account the conclusions of the CCFH on *Listeria*, or making a reference to decisions that CCFH may adopt in the future on the grounds of the outcome of the current work of the “CCFH Drafting Group on *Listeria*”.

NEW ZEALAND

The working group is to be congratulated on a draft standard that represents a significant improvement on the previous text for this standard.

Scope

New Zealand suggests that the scope should include products that are marinated prior to smoking or which may be coated with, for example, herbs and spices prior to smoking. The current wording seems to potentially exclude these products. However section 2.3 would seem to permit the inclusion of such products under this standard provided they were labelled as “marinated smoked fish” or “smoked fish with herbs” etc.

The rationale for inclusion of such products is that the end products remain similar in composition, including microbiologically to ordinary smoked fish, and fish typically constitutes >90% of the finished product.

2.2 Process Definition

The definition of hot smoking specifies a temperature of 65 degrees Celsius. It is not clear from the standard as to whether this temperature is being specified because it is thought to be effective to ensure death of parasites, or whether it is for general microbiological safety. If it is the former, New Zealand could support its inclusion provided this is stated in the text. If the latter, New Zealand observes that in fact thermal death of micro-organisms is a product of the material being processed and the time and the temperature the material is subjected to – not simply the temperature and it might be better to apply HACCP to achieve the desired result.

3.1 The Raw Material

New Zealand supports removal of the square brackets around the word [visibly] but also suggests that the word “obviously” be removed. Annex 4 should be referenced at this point.

3.6 Decomposition

New Zealand suggests that the histamine limit specified is more properly applicable to the raw material used for fish smoking and the text under section 3.6 should therefore be moved to section 3.1 The Raw Material. Otherwise the level of 10mg histamine/100g fish flesh would become the de-facto limit for histamine in the finished product which is inconsistent with the more appropriate histamine safety limit applicable to the finished product of 20mg histamine/100g fish muscle specified in section 5.7.

Other relevant parameters to indicate decomposition could be considered such as total viable counts or aerobic plate counts if this is considered necessary.

6.1.1

New Zealand would support the removal of the square brackets from “[where liquid smoke is used, it must be declared on the label]”.

7.1 Sampling

The 1 kilo sample portion seems excessive unless some clarification is provided as to why such a large sample might be required. The second paragraph in this section should therefore be removed unless such justification is provided in the text.

7.4 Determination of Dead Parasites

New Zealand suggests that it is live parasites rather than dead parasites that are of concern for this section and suggests the removal of the word “dead” from the heading and the text. It is noted that Annex 4 does not specify that it applies to dead parasites and we therefore presume its intended application is for examination for live parasites.

7.6 Procedure for Thawing

There are a variety of ways of thawing products and the best methods are based around the quantity and the time/temperature regime being designed to achieve an outcome of around -1 to +1 degrees Celsius at the core. Simply stating that frozen smoked fish shall be thawed at <5 degrees Celsius does not allow for other controlled thawing methods. We suggest as alternative text: “Thawing shall be done under such controlled conditions as are approved by the competent authority having regard to the nature of the product.”

Annex 1

The final sentence in the comments section of the table should read “Non-proteolytic *C. botulinum* is controlled under these conditions.” There may be other non-proteolytic species not controlled under these conditions.

One of the issues that may be created by application of Annex 1 is that countries where *C. botulinum* problems are endemic and likely to be present as a hazard in smoked fish, and for whom more stringent controls are necessary, may also apply such requirements to products imported from countries where *C. botulinum* is not proven to be a problem. This section may therefore be used to create unjustified technical barriers to trade.

SOUTH AFRICA

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Section 3.1 – The brackets around the word “visibly” can be removed.
2. Section 6.1.1 – The sentence in brackets should be removed and replaced by the wording “*Where liquid smoke preparations are added to smoked fish, its presence should be declared on the label. Final products that have not undergone a hot or cold smoking process, as defined, but which have only been treated with liquid smoke as per definition for liquid smoking, shall be described as “Smoke Flavoured” in the name of the product.*”

Section 6.3 – The wording in brackets should be reconsidered for practical reasons. Most of the labels of retail packs are pre-printed and producers will not know if the retail shops intend to thaw and sell the product. We would propose that the sentence be changed to read, “*It must be clearly stated on the label or by some form of notice to the customer at the point of sale, if the product has been kept in storage in frozen condition, but is then thawed prior to sale and sold as a refrigerated product.*”

3. Section 8.3 – the presence of live parasites is correctly addressed under Section 5.4. We propose that this sentence be replaced by the following wording, “*When smoked fish fillets and portions are examined as in 7.4, the presence of 2 or more instances of dead parasites with a capsular diameter greater than 3mm or a parasite not encapsulated and greater than 10mm in length*” (this will be in line with the standards for fillets and portions).

UNITED STATES

1. Scope, 2nd and 3rd sentences, revise to read as follows:

“The standard applies to whole fish, fillets and sliced and similar products thereof **either for direct consumption or for addition into** specialty products where hot or cold smoked fish constitutes only a part of the edible contents.”

Reason: For safety purposes, the provisions in this standard should apply to smoked fish that will eventually be added as an ingredient to another product in order to ensure the safety of that other product.

2.2 Process Definition, last bullet, the end of the sentence should read as follows:

“...or frozen ($\leq -18^{\circ}\text{C}$).”

Reason: Editorial, the symbol should be “less than or equal to” rather than just “less than” to correlate with the information provided in Annex 1. Products stored at -18°C are regarded as frozen.

3.6 DECOMPOSITION], delete brackets from subsection title and first sentence, remove “To be further elaborated.”

Reason: The numbers reflected in this statement are identical to those used for decomposition in standards of other histamine-producing products. Further elaboration is unnecessary and the brackets should be removed.

4. FOOD ADDITIVES

Comment: We would recommend using the language outlined in the Procedural Manual for this subsection.

5. HYGIENE AND HANDLING

Comment: We would recommend using the language outlined in the Procedural Manual for this subsection and would avoid using binding words such as “shall.”

6.1 NAME OF THE FOOD, 6.1.1, bracketed sentence, remove brackets and revise to read as follows:

“Where liquid smoke is used **as an ingredient**, it must be declared on the label. **If used as a source of smoke by heat vaporization, it need not be declared as liquid smoke on the label.**”

Reason: When liquid smoke is added directly to a product in its liquid form, such as through injection or surface coating, it is considered an ingredient and should be listed on the label. Alternatively, liquid smoke can also be vaporized through heating, during which it becomes, in effect, “smoke.” When used in this manner it should not have to be listed on the label (just as wood used to make smoke need not be listed).

6.3 LABELLING OF RETAIL PACKAGES, delete this subsection and renumber section 6.4 to 6.3

Reason: The purpose of this statement is unclear from a safety standpoint. For products that contain adequate water phase salt, or are packaged aerobically, the fact that a product was previously frozen is not an important consideration and informing the consumer serves no clear purpose. However, for products where water phase salt is not used, freezing is the only control where the product is packaged in reduced oxygen. If those products were thawed prior to sale, they would be potentially more hazardous. We would not recommend thawing frozen smoked fish products prior to sale under those conditions.

7.1 SAMPLING, 2nd paragraph, delete the text in this subsection; replace with a reference to the General Guidelines on Sampling and choose an appropriate sampling plan.

Reason: The General Guidelines on Sampling were adopted by the CAC and replace the current Sampling Plans for Prepackaged Foods (AQL-6.5) CODEX STAN 233-1969. An appropriate sampling plan should be identified from these new guidelines.

7.4 DETERMINATION OF DEAD PARASITES, rename this subsection and delete the sentence contained therein to read as follows:

“7.4 DETERMINATION OF THE VIABILITY OF NEMATODES: SEE ANNEX 2”

Reason: Annex 2 of this document is identical to Annex I of the Standard for Salted Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat and this subsection should refer to the determination of the viability of nematodes rather than the determination of dead parasites. The procedures used for parasite analysis in smoked fish are identical to those used for Salted

Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat, as described in the Standard that has been adopted by the CAC. We would therefore recommend using the same language and referring to the appropriate annex here to be consistent with the Standard for Salted Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat. The sentence currently contained within this subsection is inconsistent with the procedures outlined in the annex and should be deleted.

8.3 PARASITES, revise the sentence to read as follows:

“The presence of **readily visible** parasites in a sample of the edible portion **of the sample unit detected by normal visual inspection of the fish flesh** (see Annex 4).”

Reason: This subsection should be consistent with the language used in the Standard for Salted Atlantic Herring and Salted Sprat. The annex referred to should be Annex 4.

Annex 1, Storage Temp, 1st row, change “0°C” to “>-3°C”

Reason: Chilled refrigeration is considered to be >-3°C to 3°C.