

SIDE EVENT

Current Challenges of Ciguatera Fish Poisoning

Monday, 4 September 2017 – 18:00 to 19:00

Moderated by: John Ryder, FAO

Objective of this side event

The side event will be used as a platform to share experiences and ideas from member countries as well as to explore opportunities to face current challenges and to move FAO/WHO work on ciguatera fish poisoning forward.

Background

Ciguatera fish poisoning (CFP) is one of the most common food-borne illnesses related to finfish consumption. It has been known for centuries. Its true incidence is not known, but it is estimated that 10 000 to 50 000 people per year suffer from this illness, making it one of the most common types of marine food-borne poisonings worldwide. It is caused by the consumption of herbivorous fish that have become toxic from feeding on toxic benthic dinoflagellates (*Gambierdinus toxicus*) or from carnivorous fish that have consumed toxic herbivorous fish. *G. toxicus* is found primarily in the tropics in association with macro algae usually attached to dead corals. More than 400 species of fish are known to be vectors of ciguatera. These fish are usually found in the tropical and subtropical Pacific and Indian Ocean regions and the tropical Caribbean. However, climate change is having an impact on the distribution and proliferation of ciguatoxins (CTXs) and makes the occurrence of CFP less predictable.

As a result of recent CFP events, the capture of many species has been banned for sustained periods of time in affected areas, which will have major implications for food security and trade for these coastal communities. In addition to climate change, globalization of trade is predicted to lead to the presence of CTXs in an ever widening geographical area. Therefore guidance would be needed for those countries that currently do not consider CTX in their food safety risk management programs.

In view of all these facts, FAO organized an interagency meeting¹ in December 2015 with the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Panel on Harmful Algal Blooms (UNESCO-IOC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to discuss ciguatera fish poisoning as an increasing food safety threat. It was agreed that the most effective way to address this concern is to bring together international experts on fisheries, public health and climate change. One of the planned actions assigned to FAO was to have a side event on ciguatera during a relevant Codex Committee to define the way forward.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/blogs/blue-growth-blog/managing-ciguatera-fish-poisoning-requires-broad-partnerships/en/>

COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade

Sixteenth Session

Busan, the Republic of Korea

4-8 September 2017

It was decided that the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) was the appropriate forum to raise this issue and its 11th Session² in April 2017 the CCCF endorsed the development of risk management guidelines and the establishment of maximum limits for different CTXs. To facilitate this work, FAO and WHO will provide scientific advice to carry out a risk assessment of CTX on which the MLs would be based and review existing analytical methods for ciguatoxin detection and quantification, with a view to recommend those useful for routine analysis and surveillance.

The next step for this work will be to carry out a comprehensive review prior to the organization of a Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)³ meeting on this topic.

² <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings-reports/detail/en/?meeting=CCCF&session=11>

³ <http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/scientific-advice/jecfa/en/>