

NAFIQACEN - The Vietnamese Governmental Competent Authority On Inspection And Certification For Fishery Production Conditions And Product Quality

NGUYEN TU CUONG

National Fisheries Inspection and Quality Assurance Center (NAFIQACEN)
Badinh District, Hanoi, Vietnam

Background

Previously, the Vietnamese economy developed according to centralised government planning. The whole of fishery production and distribution was then concentrated in only 2 organizations :

- Central Fishery Corporation, regarding domestic fishery products
- Seaproducts Export-Import Corporation (SEAPRODEX), regarding export of fishery products.

There were two Quality Control Centers under them for fishery quality control in the country.

Nowadays, in a market economy, such quality management activities and organization structures are not suitable any more.

The Vietnamese fishery sector planned to succeed in developing its fisheries resources, expand export markets and meet the demands of consumption in the country, and keep up with development trends of the region and the world. The Vietnamese Government therefore promulgated Decree N^o 50/CP dated 21/6/1994 stipulating the Ministry of Fisheries' functions, responsibilities and organization structure. In this decree, the Government allowed the Ministry of Fisheries to establish the National Fisheries Inspection and Quality Assurance Center (NAFIQACEN). In this connection, the Minister of Fisheries promulgated Decision N^o 648 TS/QD dated 26/8/1994 stipulating the NAFIQACEN's functions, responsibilities and organization structure.

NAFIQACEN's Functions, Responsibilities and Organization Structure

1. NAFIQACEN's functions

The NAFIQACEN is the sole Vietnamese governmental authority on quality and hygiene safety inspection and governmental certificate issuance for fishery production conditions and fishery products.

2. NAFIQACEN's major responsibilities

- a. To investigate, set up and submit to the Ministry of Fisheries work plans, programs of NAFIQACEN on quality and hygiene safety of fishery products.
- b. To propose and take part in setting up, amending, modifying policies, regulations and standards on quality and hygiene safety of fishery products.
- c. To control, set up a system of documentation, issue and revoke certificate of fishery production conditions for business units in the country.
- d. To control, issue quality and health certificate of fishery products for export and domestic consumption according to the list stipulated by the Ministry of Fisheries.
- e. To investigate, test, develop and apply progressive quality control methods, measures for quality assurance and hygiene safety of fishery products during processing, as well as modern and new analysis-metrology methods and equipment to ensure hygiene safety, and constantly improve the quality of fishery products.
- f. To carry out international cooperation and foreign investment projects of other international organizations on quality and hygiene safety of fishery products as directed by the Ministry of Fisheries.
- g. To arrange the transfer of information and conduct training courses for quality control staff of the Vietnamese fishery sector. To conduct and assist in developing acceptable methods for quality control organizations and establishments.
- h. To provide services on quality and hygiene safety for fishery products according to current laws.
- i. To carry out professional inspection for compliance with the Commodities Quality Ordinance and legal documents concerning assurance for hygiene safety of products and production conditions according to guidance of the Ministry of Fisheries.

3. NAFIQACEN organization structure

The NAFIQACEN's Headquarters is located in Hanoi and has 3 divisions:

- Administration
- Planning and General Division
- Professional Affairs Division

NAFIQACEN has 5 branches located in 5 key fishery areas:

- NAFIQACEN Branch I is located in Hai Phong City. The management sphere of this branch is from Quang Ninh province to Ha Tinh province, covering 25 establishments; 5 of them are approved to export to European markets.
- NAFIQACEN Branch II is located in Da Nang City. The management sphere of this branch is from Quang Binh province to Binh Dinh province, covering 43 establishments; 9 of them have approval to export to European markets.
- NAFIQACEN Branch III is located in Nha Trang City. The management sphere of this branch is from Phu Yen province to Ninh Thuan province, covering 22 establishments; 5 of them have approval to export to European markets.
- NAFIQACEN Branch IV is located in Ho Chi Minh City. The management sphere of this branch is from Binh Thuan province to the north of the Hau River (one branch of Mekong river), covering 74 establishments; 27 of them have approval to export to European markets.
- NAFIQACEN Branch V is located in Minh Hai province. The management sphere of this branch is South of the Hau River, covering 31 establishments; 13 of them have approval to export to European markets.

Initial Results of Vietnamese Fishery Quality Improvement Through NAFIQACEN Activities

1. Legal documents on quality control and management

In order to control and manage quality effectively, legal documents concerning quality policies, quality and hygiene safety regulations, guidelines, and standards were gazetted. Besides serving as references on fishery quality control and management activities, these documents also guide establishments to improve product quality. At the same time when application forms are sent out to establishments, these documents are also revised and amended to meet new quality requirements of specific markets. In response to recent changes in fishery quality control, inspection and management, the NAFIQACEN is preparing to submit the following documents to the Ministry of Fisheries for approval:

- Vietnamese standard on ensuring hygienic safety for fishery production conditions; this standard corresponds to Directive 91/493/EEC.
- Regulation on inspection and certification of fishery production conditions.
- Regulation on control and certification of fishery product quality.
- Regulation on fishery technical inspection.
- Regulation on approval for GMP application.

2. Assistance of quality control improvements in establishments

In appreciation of the fact that personnel is the key factor to improve quality, the NAFIQACEN coordinated with UNIDO/DANIDA US/VIE/93/058 Project to train over 120 inspectors and analysts from NAFIQACEN branches and fishery processing establishments in April 1995. After that, the NAFIQACEN also coordinated with DANIDA 95/300/2 Project to train over 270 managers from fishery establishments on GMP application in April 1995. As at August 1996, 65 establishments which have approval to export fishery products into the EU market applied for GMP accreditation. Twenty-seven (27) of them (approx. 40%) completed documentation in preparation for applying GMP on a trial basis. After the trial period, they will be duly considered for approval by the Ministry of Fisheries at the end of this year. We anticipate from this that there will be more and more new clients from overseas markets with strict requirements on hygiene safety and the quality of fishery products.

3. Inspection of production conditions

To protect consumers' health, many international quality organizations as well as large markets in the world requested a change from quality control of finished products to complete control of all procedures from culture, catching, handling to processing and distribution of fishery products. Actually, large fishery import markets such as the EU, USA and Taiwan stipulate that fishery export countries must have their own competent authorities to inspect production conditions of fishery processing plants. Prerequisite to exporting fishery products to those markets is that export establishments must comply with health conditions for fishery processing.

At the end of 1994, based on EU Directive 91/493/EEC, NAFIQACEN inspected 112 establishments and approved 62 of these to export fishery products to the EU in 1995. At the end of 1995 those establishments and 30 others had been inspected by NAFIQACEN. Based on NAFIQACEN's results, the Ministry of Fisheries

forwarded to the EU Commission its recommendation for recognition of 65 establishments to export their fishery products to EU market in 1996.

It is significant that the NAFIQACEN not only inspects defects influencing product quality, but it also indicates measures to overcome the defects. One of the results of this activity is the better understanding of managers and QA/QC staff about production conditions influencing the quality of their products. The establishments' managers also understand that product quality depends not only on technology but also much more on production conditions. The NAFIQACEN has set up a 4-level scale, viz

- A - Excellent
- B - Good
- C - Medium
- D - Not Acceptable

There are as yet no establishments with grade A. In 1995 there were 9 establishments in grade B. With NAFIQACEN's assistance in the last two years, the establishments spent much capital to upgrade their production conditions. As a consequence of such upgrading, the number of plants at production conditions level B increased from 9 (15%) in 1995 to 15 (25%) in 1996. One of the approved establishments commented that due to improvements to production conditions it has increased the number of customers from all markets, and the turnover has increased. It can be said that if any businessman from whatever market wanted to buy fishery products from establishments whose production conditions were recognized by NAFIQACEN for export to EU, he can be sure about the hygiene safety and quality of the products.

4. Quality control and certification for fishery products

Vietnam has gradually been taking on responsibilities which are accepted as assuring maximal quality and hygiene safety of products for consumers. Simultaneously, Vietnamese manufacturers have also been assisted to better understand product quality so that they can make timely changes to improve it.

Although recently established, NAFIQACEN has quickly organized a network of branches and laboratories with the assistance of the Ministry of Fisheries to execute quality control and certification for fishery products all over the country. Figures for the first 6 months of 1996 indicate that the role of NAFIQACEN has been accepted by manufacturers and by domestic and foreign markets. In conformity with the requirements of various markets such as EU, Taiwan (for all fish products)

and USA (for shrimp products), NAFIQACEN has proved its capability as the sole competent governmental authority for quality control and certification for fish products accepted by those markets.

Quality Control Activities in the Future and Necessity for Regional Cooperation

The development strategy of the fishery sector called for processors to improve quality management and control in order to enhance the prestige of fishery products which are labelled "Made in Vietnam". To achieve this target, NAFIQACEN has first to carry out the following :

- Provide legislation and technical regulations to perfect conditions to establish conditions for quality management and control of the fishery sector.
- Strengthen professional ability for quality control staff at all levels from state to local, and assist establishments to implement GMP and HACCP practices.
- Upgrade infrastructures (laboratory facilities, analytical equipment etc for inspection on hygiene safety criteria at ports).
- Intensify inspection of production conditions at the fishery establishments, and promote the upgrading of production conditions.
- Intensify quality management controls for raw-materials.

In order to implement the above successfully and advance toward equal participation in quality management activities in the region, the NAFIQACEN gives top priority to cooperation with other countries in the region, including the following :

- To participate in activities of fishery organizations in the region
- To participate in activities of the ASEAN - CANADA Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology Project - Phase II
- To participate in cooperative activities of the ASEAN Network of Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology Centres

We wish to propose the establishment of the ASEAN Fishery Quality Management Association in order to create opportunities for exchanging experiences and assisting one another.

Conclusion

The current Vietnamese economic development program is opening many new opportunities for the fishery sector. However, in order to optimise this development, it is necessary to strengthen the role of quality management and to improve the quality of Vietnamese fishery

products. Therefore, the Vietnamese fishery sector has been renewing and improving its quality management system and facilities, training personnel for quality control programs and strengthening cooperation activities, particularly in cooperation with fishery quality management organizations of ASEAN countries, in order to advance towards synchronising the quality management activities of Vietnam with the region and the world.

Discussion

In response to the query of the representative from the ASEAN-Canada Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology Project - Phase II, the representative from Vietnam clarified that the proposed establishment of the ASEAN Fishery Quality Management Association shall involve coordination of the various laboratories in ASEAN to ensure that these laboratories have the same results as far as harmonisation of products are concerned.

The representative from the ASEAN-Canada Fisheries Post-Harvest Technology Project - Phase II apprised the Seminar that the ASEAN Canada Project is implementing an ongoing activity which includes checking of sample programmes.