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## ANALYSIS OF AGENDA ITEMS AND PREPARATION FOR THE 15<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOOD

9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> MAY 2022 Virtual Meeting

### AGENDA ITEM 13

*Methylmercury in fish: Feasibility to establish a maximum level for Patagonian toothfish and  
Other risk management recommendations for methylmercury in fish*

#### Objectives

This document offers a review and analysis of the agenda items planned for discussion at the 15<sup>th</sup> session of the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF), scheduled to take place virtually from May 9<sup>th</sup>– 13<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The document is intended for possible use by the Codex communities of practice promoted by [GForSS](#) and [PARERA](#), as part of their contribution to enhancing awareness and supporting effective participation in international food standard setting meetings (Codex meetings) by representatives from members and observers.

The analysis provided in this document offers a factual review of agenda items, their background and a discussion of some considerations. This analysis is indicative in nature and does not represent an official position of the organizations mentioned above ([PARERA](#) and [GForSS](#)), their membership or their management. It provides a synthesis and analysis of the work currently under discussion in the CCCF committee, which may be useful for delegations from Arab countries to prepare their positions taking into account the needs and specificity of the region and potential impact of the proposed food standards.

This analysis is prepared as part of the **Codex Initiative for the Arab region : Arab Codex Initiative**, implemented by [PARERA](#) and [GForSS](#), hosted and coordinated by the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO) and funded by the US Codex Office, US Department of Agriculture .

*\*It is important to note that experts – members of the Expert Working Group (EWG) – do not represent the organizations and / or jurisdictions to which they are affiliated. The selection and participation in the EWG proceedings is based on each expert's own credentials and experience which should not be misconstrued as the country's / delegation's / organization's position to which they belong.*

## Agenda Item 13: Methylmercury in fish: Feasibility to establish a maximum level for Patagonian toothfish and Other risk management recommendations for methylmercury in fish

### Documents

- ❖ CX/CF 22/15/8
- ❖ CX/CF 22/15/8-Add.1

CCCF 15 is invited to consider the discussion paper on:

1. Feasibility to establish a maximum level for Patagonian toothfish
2. Risk management measures for methylmercury in fish

### Background

As part of the recommendations presented to CCCF11 by the previous EWG, other species were identified where further data collection was advised to establish if MLs were needed. Additionally, a recommendation was made that discussion could be commenced on considering MLs for other species in the GEMS database.

**CCCF12 (2018)** agreed to establish an EWG chaired by New Zealand and co-chaired by Canada to prepare a discussion paper presenting a proposal for establishment of MLs for additional fish species. The paper was to clearly identify the fish species for which MLs should be established

**CCCF13 (2019)** agreed to request that JECFA issue a call for new data to be submitted to GEMS/Food that would support revision of the discussion paper to consider whether it is feasible to proceed with establishment of MLs for additional fish species.

A discussion paper from the EWG was considered CCCF14. Three species (orange roughy, pink cusk-eel and Patagonian toothfish) were identified for ML setting from 48 taxonomic groups of fish in total reviewed. However, in order to proceed with developing the ML for Patagonian toothfish, more data would be needed to set a robust ML

**CCCF14 (2021)** agreed to request that JECFA issue a call for new data to be submitted to GEMS/Food for all toothfish that would support revision of the discussion paper to consider whether it is feasible to set an ML for Patagonian. This call for data included all toothfish (i.e. Patagonian and Antarctic) as data gaps were also identified in the dataset for Antarctic toothfish (no methylmercury data and the total mercury data was below the selection criteria. CCCF14 also agreed to conduct a literature review to assess the feasibility of developing guidance for the management of methylmercury levels in fish

### Analysis

- ❖ Setting group MLs for the taxonomic groupings that would include pink cusk eel and Patagonian toothfish was not supported by the EWG because of lack of or insufficient data for some of the species therein or because some of them were below the 0.3 mg/kg criterion e.g. an ML for all toothfish species in the taxonomic grouping was not supported because there was no methylmercury data for Antarctic toothfish and also that the total mercury data was below the selection criteria for this species.
- ❖ For Patagonian toothfish a small number of new data was submitted to the GEMS/Food database in 2021
- ❖ With the three species identified for ML setting and 48 taxonomic groups of fish in total reviewed.
- ❖ The review of MLs for any other additional fish species could be discontinued.



- ❖ The EWG was asked if, and when, another call for data should be held for toothfish or if work to potentially elaborate ML for methylmercury in Patagonian toothfish be abandoned.
- ❖ Both EWG members providing comments agreed the data continued to be insufficient to proceed to elaborate an ML for Patagonian toothfish.

#### *General Considerations*

- ❖ In view of the lack of sufficient data for Patagonian toothfish, it was felt that further review was needed on the feasibility for setting an ML for this species.
- ❖ There was general support for undertaking a literature review to identify the feasibility of developing guidance for the management of methylmercury levels in fish. The EWG Chair clarified that the literature review aimed to identify practical measures for the management of methylmercury in fish (e.g. at the catch, sorting and processing level).

#### *Considerations for the Arab Region*

- ❖ A review of the literature shows that Patagonian toothfish, Orange roughy and pink-cusk-eel does not seem with interest for Arab region.

#### *General comments*

- ❖ The EWG commented on the updates to the discussion paper being prepared for CCCF15 that included the results of the 2021 call for data.
- ❖ It seemed appropriate to abandon establishment of an ML for Patagonian given that tooth fish was proposed for ML elaboration by CCCF13 and there have been two calls for data from which sufficient data have not been obtained. This member also noted that the current methylmercury data do not meet the selection criteria.
- ❖ The EWG were asked if they could provide any data to support the development of a guidance paper for the management of methylmercury levels in fish at catch, sorting and processing level. One member indicated they did not have any information available.
- ❖ A review of the literature could not identify sufficient information to support the development of a guidance paper; consequently, it is not feasible to develop guidance for the management of methylmercury in fish.

#### *Recommendation*

- ❖ Based on the information available, it would be suggested for Arab Codex delegations to concur with the position to not develop a ML for methylmercury in Patagonian toothfish.

