Report from the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils
23rd Session, Langkawi, Malaysia.

Gretel Bescoby represented IFFO at the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils meeting held in Langkawi, Malaysia in February where the new proposed draft Codex standard for fish oils was discussed at great length.

The CODEX ALIMENTARIUS sets international standards and guidelines for food products that are intended for direct human consumption. The purpose is to contribute to the safety, quality and fairness of international food trade. This is so that consumers can trust the safety and quality of the food products they buy and importers can trust that the food they ordered will be in accordance with their specifications. Although Codex standards are not mandatory they set a precedent and are often adopted by the health authorities of individual countries.

Comments from participating countries and NGO’s with Observer status were accepted by the Codex Committee. Comments made by IFFO members were included in a report from the Informal Industry Working Group, of which we are members, and submitted via the Federation of European Speciality Food Ingredients Industries (ELC). IFFO has re-applied for Observer status which will enable us to represent our members accurately and directly at the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils meetings in future.

The draft Fish Oil standard is a work in progress and an electronic working group chaired by Switzerland, will continue to collate input from participating countries and Observers. There were numerous discussions on a wide range of topics but without going into too much detail a few concerns are highlighted in the list below:

- **Scope:** There has been much debate whether crude fish oil should be included in the standard since the Codex standard is only intended for foodstuff for human consumption.
- **Description:** It was agreed that the term “by-products” can be confusing and should not be used but rather fish trimmings.
- The list of named fish oils were of particularly interest. Although some participant countries wanted to expand the list (including different genera of fish species) it was generally felt that a list of named fish oils should only include those oils that are produced and traded in significant volumes.
- **Essential Composition and quality factors:** The fatty acid composition table will be revised and only fairly recent scientifically verified data with known references will be used.
- A number of concerns regarding the quality parameters were raised such as the maximum of the acid value for krill oil is too low, should oligomers be included as a quality parameter considering...
the sophisticated equipment needed for the analysis, the inclusion of vitamin levels for fish liver oils, whether to include a section on the freshness of the raw material and if separate parameters for flavoured oils should be included.

- **Food additives**: The addition of other food additives such as tocopherols, rosemary extract, citric acid and lecithin were discussed. There was much debate whether the use of astaxanthin justifies being included in the list of additives.

- **Contaminants**: It was felt that there was a need to re-evaluate the maximum levels for lead and arsenic. The matter regarding organic versus inorganic arsenic in fish oil was raised and it was felt that the maximum levels should be for inorganic arsenic only. The question was raised whether limits for pesticides and veterinary drugs should be included in the standard although veterinary drugs are only applicable to farmed fish.

- **Labelling**: A number of countries raised concerns regarding farmed fish and it was felt that farmed fish oil should be clearly labelled.

The Codex fish oil standard has generated very lively debates and clearly strong opinions and has taken up a major share of the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils time at the meeting. Due to a lack of time and too many concerns raised at the meeting, the electronic working group (eWG), has been tasked with discussing, deliberating and coming to an agreement regarding the concerns. The eWG will also gather additional information needed, especially on the trade volumes of fish oils and the fatty acid composition of the fish oils they decide to include in the table. IFFO members can particularly be of help to determine which fish species are produced and traded in substantial amounts in order to be included in the named fish oil list.

The next Codex Committee on Fats and Oils meeting will be held in 2 years by which time most of the concerns would hopefully have been resolved. Furthermore, a practical working group will meet the day before the next Codex meeting to facilitate finalising the standard. IFFO will continue to monitor progress made in the proposed Fish Oil standard and should members have any concerns regarding the proposed standard they must not hesitate to contact us.

IFFO will continue to keep members informed of developments regarding the standard and would be happy to e-mail members the final Codex report on the meeting held should they request it.

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