

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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CL 2022/47-CF
September 2022

TO: Codex Contact Points
Contact Points of international organizations having observer status with Codex

FROM: Secretariat, Codex Alimentarius Commission,
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme

SUBJECT: Request for information on national sampling plans for methylmercury in fish or other contaminants in fish

DEADLINE: 25 December 2022

BACKGROUND

1. At the 15th Session of the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF15, 2022), it was agreed to continue work on the sampling plan for methylmercury in fish and that the work of the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CCMAS) on the revision of the *General Guidelines on Sampling* (CXG 50-2004) should be considered in the work on sampling plans.
2. Furthermore, CCCF15 agreed that the recommendations for the sampling plans would be considered at CCCF17 (2024) to allow for time to gather information on national sampling plans and to consider revisions of the *General Guidelines on Sampling*, targeted for completion by CCMAS by June 2023.
3. For information, please refer to the discussion paper submitted to CCCF15 [CX/CF 22/15/8¹](#) and the outcomes of the discussion on this matter at CCCF15 in the report of its session [REP22/CF15](#) (paragraphs 105 – 112).
4. The information on national sampling plans will allow the Electronic Working Group (EWG), chaired by New Zealand and co-chaired by Canada, to further develop the sampling plans in Appendix II of the discussion paper especially regarding those fish species for which maximum level (MLs) have been established.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

5. Codex members and observers are invited to submit information on national sampling plans to further develop the sampling plan for methylmercury in fish. Input from key exporting and importing countries of tuna, shark, alfonsino, marlin, orange roughy and pink cusk-eel would be of great value.
6. To develop a sampling plan based on information presented in Appendix II and considerations given in paragraphs 36-38 of [CX/CF 22/15/8](#), please provide information on the following specific points:
 - a) National sampling plans available for mercury in fish, or other contaminants in fish, in particular: tuna, shark, alfonsino, marlin, orange roughy and pink cusk-eel.

The following types of details from national sampling plans are sought:

 - i. how lots of fish that are not of comparable length or weight are sub-divided into sub-lots for sampling;
 - ii. how samples are taken;
 - iii. where on the fish the sample is taken, both laterally and top (dorsal) to bottom (ventral)
 - iv. the tissues included in the sample (e.g., skin is removed, red muscle tissue should not be sampled, deboned);
 - v. typical ranges of commercial lot sizes;
 - vi. typical size ranges of commercially harvested fish for which Codex MLs are established;
 - vii. if reconditioning sub-lots is practical and feasible; reconditioning involves removing the length/weight class(es) that exceed the ML so that the remainder of the lot of smaller fish are in compliance; and
 - viii. information on relevant risk management measures (e.g., catch, sorting) that could be incorporated into the sampling plan.
 - b) Data or studies from the primary literature available on the distribution of mercury laterally and from top (dorsal) to bottom (ventral) for tuna, shark, alfonsino, marlin, orange roughy and pink cusk eel is needed. Information is available for tuna but appears to be lacking for other fish species for which Codex MLs are developed.

¹ Working documents, including the report of CCCF15 (2022), are available on the Codex website as follows:
<https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/detail/it/?meeting=CCCF&session=15>

GUIDANCE ON THE PROVISION OF COMMENTS

7. Comments should be submitted through the Codex Contact Points of Codex members and observers using the OCS.
8. Contact Points of Codex members and observers may login to the OCS and access the document open for comments by selecting “Enter” in the “My reviews” page, available after login to the system.
9. Contact Points of Codex members and observers’ organizations are requested to provide proposed changes and relevant comments/justifications on a specific paragraph (under the categories: editorial, substantive, technical and translation) and/or at the document level (general comments or summary comments). Additional guidance on the OCS comment categories and types can be found in the OCS [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#).
10. Other OCS resources, including the user manual and short guide, can be found at the following link: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/resources/circular-letters/en/>.
11. For questions on the OCS, please contact Codex-OCS@fao.org.