**DRAFT ADVICE**

**EU marketing standards for fishery**

**and aquaculture products**

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**Introduction and context**

In accordance with the Better Regulation Package Guidelines, the European Commission launched an evaluation of the EU marketing standards to assess the extent to which these are still fit for purpose.

The current marketing standards cover some fresh and chilled products, preserved tuna and bonito and preserved sardines and sardine-like products and are mandatory requirements along the supply chain (between producers, retailers and potential intermediaries).

In its public consultation, the Commission aims to examine the **relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and the EU added** value of the current marketing standards for fishery products.

The regulatory framework under evaluation is:

* Council Regulation (EEC) No 2136/89 of 21 June 1989 laying down common marketing standards for preserved sardines;
* Council Regulation (EEC) No 1536/92 of 9 June 1992 laying down common marketing standards for preserved tuna and bonito;
* Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96 of 26 November 1996 laying down common marketing standards for certain fishery products; and
* Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products – Chapter III – Common Marketing Standards;

In July 2018, MAC established a Focus Group to formulate advice on the basis of the following specific questions:

* awareness of current regulatory framework on marketing standards
* practical implementation of current regulatory framework on marketing standards
* relevance and usefulness of marketing standards
* standards the MAC would like to see implemented and reasons why
* standards the MAC would advise to eliminate and reasons why

A total of 15 responses were received from members, representing interests at national and EU association level.

**Report on the MAC questionnaire**

**Awareness of current regulation on marketing standards**

MAC members are aware of the main standards relating to freshness and size that exist within the current regulatory framework.

All of the respondents mentioned Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96, while most mentioned all of the Regulations under this public consultation. Codex and voluntary standards were also mentioned.

Some respondents felt that the standards currently used are not always/necessarily recognised as EU regulation, but reflect best practice guidelines from national bodies. This is not the case of preserved tuna and sardines Regulations.

**Practical implementation of current regulation on marketing standards**

The regulatory framework under evaluation was found to be respected, although not in all cases exactly as outlined within the regulations[[1]](#footnote-1); in some cases national provisions are even stricter in order to respond to market demands.

**Relevance and usefulness of marketing standards**

The current marketing standards on preserved tuna and bonito and preserved sardines and sardine-like products, or Council Regulations (EEC) No 2136/89 and No 1536/92, **are considered relevant and are defined by MAC members as an important reference in the market that should not change.**

1. Marketing standards for certain fresh or chilled fishery products provided in the Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96 **do not seem to be/are not entirely in line with market demands or B2B requirements**. MAC is therefore in favour of revisiting Council Regulation (EC) No 2406/96 so that it better reflects new market developments and changes in trade practices.

More precisely:

* **freshness categories** (Extra, A and B) - **are no longer considered useful**[[2]](#footnote-2). Freshness is only considered a relevant criterion at first sale and should be limited to two options: either “pass” or “fail”.
* **size categories** (1, 2, 3, ..., depending on the species) – **are considered relevant and useful.** Defining size/weight categories helps buyers to meet customers/consumers demands[[3]](#footnote-3). This standard provides a good overview of size/weight of product groups and the Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS).

MCRS are a very important reference point in the market, where these are not defined, Producer Organizations should define a minimum marketing size (MMS) that should be the same everywhere in the EU so to enable a level playing field. [[4]](#footnote-4)

Wherever possible MCRS should be aligned with MMS.

**Standards the MAC would like to see implemented and reasons why**

* **Council Regulation (EEC) No 2136/89 of 21 June 1989** laying down common marketing standards for preserved sardines;
* **Council Regulation (EEC) No 1536/92 of 9 June 1992** laying down common marketing standards for preserved tuna and bonito;

Common marketing standards, in particular tuna-bonito and sardine and sardine-type preserves, are a useful tool to establish a minimum and adequate criterion for marketing fisheries products such as tuna and sardines, whose supply chain is worldwide.

The regulations applicable to the commercialization of preserved tuna-bonito and sardines and sardines-type products are aligned with the corresponding CODEX standards which have been recently updated and are applied without any problem.

The existing standards and trade descriptions for preserved tuna and bonitos and sardines and sardine-type products were developed with the participation of EU stakeholders to ensure their adaptation to the real needs of the EU market and the EU processing industry.

These standards do not imply the application of stricter requirements than those established in B2B relationships, they ensure harmonized functioning of the common market, and a fair and sustainable market for these products.

* **Regulations should provide for a possibility to develop other marketing standards** in case this becomes a necessity in the market. Elaboration of such standards should involve the EU industry and pursue the level playing field among its main objectives.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Standards the MAC would advise to eliminate and reasons why**

In general MAC believes that current regulations should be retained. However changes in trade practices and market developments suggested a need for greater flexibility. More precisely MAC members mentioned:

* **size categories/standards** have to allow for a degree of flexibility in order to reflect the ever-changing market demands for different products and sizes. It should be possible to evaluate size/weight categories regularly based on market preferences and/or any new and scientifically based biological information that may require adjustments.

The MAC can monitor and evaluate market developments and adjustments needed for the MS as an annual point on the agenda. If and when needed, the MAC can set up an advice for the Commission on what changes the stakeholders put forward.

The Commission should have the legal framework to make changes to the MS within a short time period following this advice.

* **freshness ratings/categories** are only used as criteria at first sale, they are not relevant throughout the value chain

**Position of MAC**

* Council Regulation (EEC) No **2136/89** of 21 June 1989 laying down common marketing standards for preserved sardines and Council Regulation (EEC) No **1536/92** of 9 June 1992 laying down common marketing standards for preserved tuna and bonito **are fit for purpose and should not be revised.**
* Council Regulation (EC) No **2406/96** of 26 November 1996 laying down common marketing standards for certain fishery products **requires revision**.
* Commercial sizes should be coherent with minimum (biological) sizes in order to prevent discarding of fish that is fit for human consumption.
* While size/weight categories are considered useful, implementations rules are considered too prescriptive and detailed (i.e. describing the exact weight for different grades of each specie) to be efficient or effective. They need to be simplified.
* Freshness categories are considered relevant only at first sale in the chain. Categorisation of freshness should be left to the business operator.
* Remote buying and selling may require a harmonised and standardized system, development of which should be left to the business operators. MAC recommends unification of standards, in line with similar best practices in other sectors in agribusiness.
* European Commission should identify an optimal degree of flexibility within this regulation so to allow business operators to meet the different market demands, while keeping the highest possible level of harmonised standards that would preserve the level playing field.
* MAC believes more efforts are needed when it comes to harmonised implementation of EU regulations and supports more controls in the market.
* MAC would like to stress the importance of coherence with other EU rules (food safety, hygiene, consumer information, conservation rules) as well as with other relevant norms and standards.
* MAC believes that clearly defended standards are necessary in the market in order to ensure that the EU market is supplied with sustainable products, that uniform and transparent criteria are applied throughout the single market, that fair competition is guaranteed and the profitability of the EU production is improved.

1. In Belgium, the government imposes a different length standard for sole (25 cm). In addition, the producer’s organisation can impose its own measures regarding size and weight.

   Scottish demersal fish landings are predominantly graded on length rather than weight, although some species are sometimes graded by weight, with some purchasers requiring very specific sizes of fish.

   Practice in the Netherlands is similar to that in Scotland. Sorting by means of *length* after the spawning period could lead to results which are not in line with the regulation. The measuring of the length of individual fish is considered best practice, while establishing the weight for each individual specimen is not workable in the catching phase.

   In France categorization of hollow oysters is made obligatory by decree and applied by the French members of the inter-branch and any operator exporting CG hollow oysters to the French market for human consumption. Categorization of flat oysters is a set of voluntary standards in France applied only to French members of the interprofessional organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Principal aim of the common marketing standards for fishery products are to improve products quality. For buyers, the quality of a product is defined by a combination of factors where freshness is one of many. Equally important are product colour, accurate weight, size of the product and gutting quality. Due to significant improvements in maintaining the cold chain since 1996, high freshness of fish products has become a standard and therefore less of a factor in determining quality. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. However, categorizing fish in different sizes has to be done in a correct way. Size categories are often mixed. Therefore, regulation enforcement and regular controls are necessary to keep these characteristics uniform and keep the level playing field. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. However, considering the Landing Obligation, extra restrictions on the sale for human consumption such as minimum weight, in addition to the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS), are not considered to be efficient. If fish is eligible to use for human consumption it should not be discarded for reasons of minimum market size only. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In accordance with CEN procedures - <https://www.cen.eu/Pages/default.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)