

## FISHERIES WORKING GROUP – 23 JANUARY 2019

### BULLETIN: ANISAKIS

#### 1 Recommendation

##### 1.1 It is recommended that the Group notes this bulletin

#### 2 Discussion

- 2.1 During the Group's visit to Whitelink Seafoods Ltd on 12 September 2018, members viewed the process by which whitefish fillets are screened for Anisakis, a naturally occurring parasite found in marine fauna. It was explained by the company's Managing Director that whitefish species caught in Scottish waters enjoy a quality advantage over fish caught in more southerly waters in that levels of Anisakis are considerably lower in Scottish waters. In recent months, Whitelink Seafoods had experienced a significant increase in trade, particularly with supermarkets in mainland Europe, which was closely linked to the low incidence of Anisakis. Price was considered to be a secondary issue. It was suggested by the company that the Group use its influence to help safeguard this natural advantage by encouraging the Scottish catching sector to change behaviour to minimise levels of Anisakis in fish.
- 2.2 The scale of the parasite in Spanish-caught whitefish – particularly hake – has led to an initiative by the Spanish catching sector to install microwave technology onboard vessels to process fish offal (after gutting) before being returned to the sea. The process uses no chemicals and is fully automated. Equipment manufacturers claim treated offal is free of Anisakis. It is unclear whether installation is being grant aided by EMFF.
- 2.3 After the factory visit, council officers contacted Marine Scotland Science to obtain further information on Anisakis in Scottish waters and to ask whether the issue was the subject of any current research. A holding reply suggested it was not the subject of current research activity but further details were to follow. Meanwhile, elected members requested the issue be raised at the forthcoming meeting of NE Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership (NESFDP) at Peterhead Port on 2 November 2018. The Managing Director of Whitelink Seafoods Ltd was invited to make a presentation on Anisakis at NESFDP and accepted the opportunity, setting out the background to the issue and the current situation very clearly, stimulating an extended question and answer session.
- 2.4 The meeting was attended by Stewart Stevenson MSP who committed to raising the issue with Mr Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy. On 26 November 2018 a letter arrived from Mr Stevenson, attached to a reply from Mr Ewing which cited the scientific references underpinning the Scottish Government's policy on Anisakis. This correspondence is attached as **Appendix 1**.

- 2.5 Mr Ewing's letter explained that the evidence from several scientific studies across Europe had concluded that the prevalence and intensity of the parasite is largely determined by the population density of final hosts such as seals and dolphins. Based on this evidence, the effect of onboard treatment of fish offal was, in the view of Scottish Government, likely to have no effect or only a very negligible effect upon Anisakis populations in wild commercial fish species in Scottish waters, and therefore that the cost of installing and maintaining treatment facilities onboard fishing vessels was unlikely to generate a commercial return in respect of higher prices paid for fish at the quayside.
- 2.6 The letters from Mr Stevenson and Mr Ewing were passed on to Whitelink Seafoods Ltd. Whilst attending the North Sea Commission Marine Resources Group meeting in Groningen 9-10 January, a council officer raised the issue of Anisakis in commercial fish species with delegates from Norway. Their comments supported the scientific consensus that high seal populations were the principal cause of increased levels of Anisakis.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

Fisheries Working Group is able to consider this item in terms of its remit to provide a focus to enable issues and concerns across the wider fisheries sector in Aberdeenshire to be addressed.

### **4 Implications and Risk**

- 4.1 There are no equality impact implications arising from this report
- 4.2 There are no staffing and financial implications for the council arising from this report.
- 4.3 No risks arising from this report have been identified for the council at Corporate Level
- 4.4 No issues have been identified in relation to the Town Centre First Principle

Belinda Miller  
Head of Economic Development

Report prepared by Derek McDonald  
Industry Support Executive (Rural & Maritime)  
14 January 2019



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Stewart Stevenson MSP  
Banffshire & Buchan Coast  
Stiùbhart MacSteafain BPA  
Siorrachd Bhanbh agus Oirthir Bhùchainn

26 November/An Samhain 2018

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Our Ref: ZS/rjm

ID 41540

Dear Derek

### Anisakis Parasites in Fish

Further to Mr. Sutherland's presentation at the last meeting of the North East Scotland Fisheries Development Partnership, I sufficiently concerned as to bring the matter to the attention of the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy.

I have now received his response, a copy of which is attached for your information.

I trust that this is helpful, but if there are any matters arising from the content of the response on which you would like me to make further enquiries, I would be pleased to do so.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

STEWART STEVENSON MSP

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27 NOV 2018

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Your ref: ZS/rjm  
Our ref: 2018/0039172  
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*Anisakis simplex sensu stricto* has been reported infecting commercial fish species for over 100 years. It has a worldwide distribution occurring in all the major oceans and seas and can be found in many commercially viable species such as Atlantic cod, Herring and Hake.

A study of commercial marine species carried out for the Food Standards Agency (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228362845> *A Survey of Anisakis and Pseudoterranova in Scottish fisheries and the efficacy of current detection methods FSAS Project S14008*) in 2007 by scientists from Marine Scotland, the University of Aberdeen and Stirling University reported that infection was quite high in all areas sampled around Scotland, suggesting that targeting different fishing grounds or species would be very ineffective in terms of avoiding catches of infected fish.

Anisakid prevalence and intensity is largely determined by the density of the final hosts such as seals and dolphins. Studies by Danish and Polish investigators ([Buchmann and Kania, 2012](#), [Mehrdana et al., 2014](#), [Horbowy et al., 2016](#)) have documented a marked increase in Anisakid infections of Baltic cod when compared to studies in the 1970s and 1980s ([Möller, 1975](#), [Thulin et al., 1989](#), [Myjak et al., 1994](#)) when seal abundance was low. Similarly, seal population sizes in Iceland were previously shown to be correlated with Anisakid infections ([Hauksson, 2002](#), [Hauksson, 2011](#)) as well as in Norway ([Jensen and Idås, 1992](#)).

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Accordingly, the main driver of Anisakid infections in wild fish is the density of marine mammals. Consequently, and based on the published evidence available, the effect of treating fish offal before discharge would likely to have no, or a very negligible, effect on Anisakid populations in wild commercial fish species as Anisakid infection is already endemic to commercial stocks. Additionally, the cost to the fishing industry of purchasing, and maintenance, of the equipment is unlikely to be realised by reduced Anisakid burdens, and associated higher price, in Scottish hake.

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