

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India to set permissible limits for formaldehyde in fish by August

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PANAJI: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is expected to complete the process of setting standards for naturally-occurring formaldehyde in fish by August next year.

SEAFOOD STUDY

July 3 | Grant received from FSSAI

Oct 1 | Collection of samples from different environs and different production methods

Nov 30 | Till November, 116 samples comprising 31 aquatic species have been collected and analysed

Dec 2019 to March 2020 | A

total of 1,260 samples will be analysed (30 samples of each species will be analysed during this period and data will be collated)

May 2020 - June 2020 | In the next set of 30 species, 900 samples will be analysed (30 samples of each of the species from different locations of India) and data collated

The authority's scientific panel on fish and fisheries products has initiated a collaborative research project called 'Natural level of formaldehyde in freshly harvested fin fish and shellfish species' with an estimated budget of Rs 54 lakhs, following directions issued by the high court of Bombay at Goa last year.

The exercise initiated on July 3 this year will cover 72 major commercial species of fish in different types of aquatic environment which represent around 90 percent of fish produced and consumed in India.

The counsel representing FSSAI under the ministry of health and family welfare, New Delhi, Dattaprasad Lawande, told the high court that 30 samples of each of the 72 species will be analysed during the exercise.

This will take time, he told the court. Factors of age, sex, temperature, salinity of water and behavior of the fish that contribute to variation in composition of fish will have to be taken into consideration. FSSAI has stated that data of two seasons need to be collected for the project.

Till date, 116 samples covering 31 species of fish from four different states have already been tested, the FSSAI submitted to the court through its chief officer Pawan Agarwal, who was present in court in connection with the five public interest litigations on the presence of formalin in fish, that came to light in July last year.

Once the analysis is complete post June 2020, it will be placed in the first meeting of the FSSAI, Lawande told the court, adding that the CEO was personally monitoring the exercise. The standards of formaldehyde in fish will then be notified as per the process of law in accordance with the food safety and standards act, the authority has stated.

Justice Mahesh Sonak said the issue shouldn't be treated as a routine matter and asked the authority to file status reports on the progress of the exercise.

Agarwal, in his affidavit, expressed regret that he was not present in court for the hearing on December 5 due to the parliamentary sessions and stated that he had absolutely no intention to defy the orders of the court.