



OFFICIAL CONTROLS OF ESTABLISHMENTS APPROVED ACCORDING TO REGULATION (EC) 853/2004 SECTION VIII, FISHERY PRODUCTS IN THE LOMBARDY REGION (2023-2024)

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Purpose. Lombardy has a significant fisheries supply chain for the marketing and processing of fish products: 217 establishments are active with 252 recognized activities, equal to 9.4% of Italian establishments of this type. The objective of this study is to highlight the outcomes of Official Controls(OC) in fish production establishments approved according to Regulation (EC) 853/2004, Section VIII, Fishery Products, in the Lombardy Region during the two-year period 2023-2024.

Methods. The study considered the Official Controls(OC) carried out pursuant to Regulation(EU) 2017/625 by the SIAOA of the 8 Local Health Unit Authority(ATS) belonging to the Veterinary and Food Safety Departments of Animal Origin during the period 2023-2024 in fish production establishments. OC data were extracted from the official regional database. The statistical analysis for calculating the "p-value" was performed with "R Core Team (2019). R: A language and environment for statistical computing."

Results. The findings in the risk-based scheduled audits represent 75.5% of the total 5,637 findings collected in the audits. The reasons for the checks are mainly: program implementation (73.9%), verification of export requirements to third countries (1.2%). The unscheduled activities are mainly: implementation of measures pursuant to Article 138 of Regulation (EU) 2017/625 (8.5%), export certificates/attestations (7.1%), recognition (4%), activities upon notification/request from other authorities (2.9%), alerts (0.8%). The total number of non-compliant procedures (NC) in the two-year period is 583 out of 5,637 procedures examined (10%) considering both audits and inspections. A total of 353 audits and 1,424 inspections were conducted. Nonconformities de-

tected during audits accounted for 53% of the total, while those identified during inspections accounted for 47%. There is a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.0001$) between the identification of NC during audits compared to those detected during inspections, this is in accordance with international literature. The comparison was conducted using the Chi-square test of independence (or Fisher's exact test). 19% (307) represents the percentage of NC procedures checked during audits, while 7% are NC procedures during inspections. The most checked procedures are: "Maintenance of premises, systems and equipment"(11%), which reports NC equal to 20% (119), "Food hygiene and state of conservation"(10%) with 7% of NC. The "Hazard analysis" procedure detects 27% of NC, or 7% of all NC, representing 3% of the controls. The "HACCP Validation and/or Verification" procedure represents 20% of NC, or 2% of the total NC, constituting 1% of the controls.

Conclusions. The results of the OC at the above-mentioned recognized facilities highlight how the SIAOA of the Lombardy ATS carry out their OC activities in compliance with EU regulations, ensuring high standards of food safety and market protection. This is achieved through both scheduled and non-scheduled OC activities. The audit tool has proven effective in identifying NC and is complementary to inspection. When inspecting procedures, particular attention should be paid to those with the highest nonconformity rates in the company's history. Given the complexity of the seafood supply chain and the results obtained, it is desirable to strengthen the OC on procedures such as HACCP validation and verification and hazard analysis, along with opportunities for discussion with the fisheries representatives of the various ATS, thus promoting the specialized training of OC personnel.