

Berichte

20th annual meeting of the WEFTA Working Group on Analytical Methods in Fish and Fishery Products and 3rd annual meeting of the WEFTA Working Group on Microbiology

– A retrospect on 20 years –

by

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The 20th annual meeting of the WEFTA (West European Fish Technologists' Association) Working Group on Analytical Methods (WGAM) took place at the Sea Fisheries Department (CLO Gent) at Ostend, Belgium, on May, 24-25, 1998, under the chairmanship of J. Oehlenschläger (DE). The meeting was attended by delegates from 11 countries: Denmark (1), Belgium (2), France (1), The Netherlands (1), Iceland (1), UK (1), Portugal (1), Poland (1), Norway (1), Sweden (1) and Germany (2). Parallel to the Analytical Methods Group the Microbiology Group (WGM) had its 3rd annual meeting which was chaired this year by Björn Tore Lunestad (N). The Microbiological Group was attended by participants from 9 European countries: Ireland (1), Norway (2), Belgium (1), Portugal (1), Denmark (1), The Netherlands (1), Spain (1), Germany (1), UK (1).

How it started

After 20 annual meetings it is worth to have a look back and to see how it has started. There has been very little collaboration on research projects between member institutes under the auspices of WEFTA, co-operation in more neutral areas of common interest was developed at an early stage. The area which has proved very fruitful is methodology. It was agreed that probably the best way to make progress was to arrange meetings at each laboratory in turn where experienced, practising scientists could describe in detail how they carried out analyses. In this way, difficulties could be demonstrated or uncovered, and the accuracy, precision, efficiency and cost of the methods used in different laboratories could be compared.

At the time of WEFTA's inauguration (1970) several different systems of sensory analysis of fish and fishery

products were in use, each peculiar to an institute or country. It was clear that it would be very useful to bring together the experts of different laboratories in order to compare on the same samples of fish at the same time, the systems they were using. Such comparisons formed, in fact, the basis of the activities of some of the earliest of what became known as the Working Group (WG) on Sensory Assessment for Fishery Products. Thus, chilled fish at various stages of spoilage was scored by participants using their individual systems. In this way an exact comparison of the steps in the scoring system, including descriptions of spoilage could be made.

Zwanzigstes Jahrestreffen der WEFTA
Arbeitsgruppe für Analytische Methoden
in Fischen und Fischereierzeugnissen
und drittes Jahrestreffen der WEFTA
Arbeitsgruppe für Mikrobiologie

– Ein Blick zurück auf 20 Jahre –

Ende Mai 1998 tagte die WEFTA Arbeitsgruppe für Analytische Methoden (WGAM) in Ostende, Belgien, zum zwanzigsten Mal seit ihrer Gründung im Jahre 1978 und dem ersten Jahrestreffen 1979 in Bremerhaven. Es werden die Entstehungsgründe einer solchen Arbeitsgruppe der WEFTA, ihre Vorsitzenden, ihre Mitglieder und entsendenden WEFTA-Länder, sowie behandelte Arbeitsthemen, Ergebnisse und Publikationen erwähnt. Aus der Arbeit der WGAM heraus entstand 1996 Arbeitsgruppe für Mikrobiologie, die in diesem Jahr ihr drittes Treffen abhielt. Anlässlich der zwanzigsten Tagung der WGAM wird ein kurzer Überblick über die nunmehr zwanzigjährige Geschichte dieser ersten WEFTA-Arbeitsgruppe gegeben.

Later, frozen fish stored for different length of time and, therefore, of diminishing quality was included. The work of these early WGs must be one of the first intercalibration exercises in sensory assessment ever conducted anywhere. Part of the stimulus for this sensory work was the growing use within the European Community (later European Union) of uniform schemes for market grading of "wet" (i.e. unprocessed) fish.

Many of the methods (including non-sensory ones) discussed over the years have been relevant to the details of EC/EU regulations, decisions and directives. Normally, appropriate findings of the WGs are communicated to those in the EC/EU responsible for preparing drafts of these documents. Also the results of some of the WGs have been of value in directing discussions at meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Committee (FAO/WHO) for Fish and Fishery Products concerned with framing quality standards.

A few of these earlier ad hoc working groups for sensory methods and other analytical problems were held since 1972 almost annually, with always one meeting, but occasionally two.

Birth of the WGAM

The WGAM was so-to-say born during the WEFTA General meeting in 1978 in Reykjavik, Iceland, on the 5th of October. During the directors meeting many participating heads of delegations felt that there was not enough space in the plenary WEFTA meeting to discuss analytical problems of the member laboratories in detail, therefore it was decided that a working group should be set up with the function "to consider and recommend methods of sensory and non-sensory measurement of quality in the widest sense".

The first 10 meetings were chaired by Pé Houwing (NL), Jörg Oehlenschläger (D) took over the chair in 1989. The first meeting 1979 at Bremerhaven was attended by participants from Belgium (W. Vyncke), Denmark (P. F. Jensen), France (Mlle. F. Soudan), Germany (U. Kietzmann, K. Priebe, N. Antonacopoulos, J. Oehlenschläger and E. Reinacher), Iceland (G. Valdimarsson), Ireland (M. Dorgan), The Netherlands (J. Bon and H. Houwing), United Kingdom (A. Aitken).

During the following years participants from other countries joined the group: Norway (1981), Spain (1985), Portugal and Poland (1991), Sweden (1994) and The Faroe Islands (1996). With W. Vyncke and J. Oehlenschläger only two participants who were present at the first meeting were left at the 20th meeting. These two participant have participated in 19 and 20 WGAM meetings, respectively.

Intercalibration

The meetings were held alternately at almost all European fishery research laboratories from Reykjavik as the northernmost place to Lisbon as southernmost place. The main topics discussed at meetings in the first ten years were issues originating from the ongoing work of the Codex Alimentarius Committee for Fish and Fishery Products, which takes place biannually in Norway. These early topics were: Definition of the defect bone, determination of thaw drip and glaze, deglazing methods, parasites, determination of fish core portion in breaded and battered fishery products, net contents, determination of proportion of minced fish content in mixed QF fish blocks foreign water determination, nitrogen factor, nitrogen determination by Kjeldahl etc.

Later the WGAM's work concentrated more on EU (former EC) issues: Fish hygiene regulation, EC grading scheme, EC standards for sardines and tuna etc. During the last years the practical work being done during the meetings (demonstration of methodology, practical tests) has more and more been replaced by interlaboratory trials, which deserve skilful personnel and modern instruments, and which are therefore made in member laboratories. Examples for these are: Determination of total volatile nitrogen (TVB-N), biogenic amines, sulphite determination in shrimps, indole as a quality criterion in shrimps and prawns, salt determination, acetic acid determination.

The collaborative trials performed in the WGAM and the intensive discussions during the plenary meetings led to a number of proposals for EU-funded shared cost projects and Concerted Actions, which were partly accepted and financed.

WG on Microbiology

In 1994 based on proposals from Denmark a questionnaire was sent to all WEFTA laboratories asking if there was a need for establishing a new Working Group on Microbiology. The answer was very positive, and during the directors' meeting in 1995 a new Working Group on Microbiology was inaugurated. This new WGM had its first meeting in 1996 in Bergen (N). The meetings of the WGM take always place parallel to the WGAM meetings and the first more formal and introductory topics on the agenda as well as the concluding topics of the agenda are made in a plenary session with both groups to keep each other informed.

Chairman of the WGM is the chairman of the WGAM. However, during the parallel session of the WGM, where

exclusively microbiological issues are discussed, a session chairperson is elected by the WGM itself.

The main advantages of the WEFTA working groups in contrast to other formalised groups of this kind are:

- concentration on fish as food
- participation of almost all European countries interested in fish (EU member states and others)
- working groups are completely independent and are financed by the budgets of the member institutes
- participation is on a voluntary basis
- all discussions and deliberations are strictly confidential
- members can freely express their thoughts, concerns and ideas
- working groups are a forum where unconventional thinking is most welcome and where nobody is blamed because of his/her contributions
- results and recommendations based on the working groups work will be brought to the public only when consensus is reached within the group

WEFTA WGAM publications

WGAM has published some publications as results of collaborative trials and interlaboratory comparison exercises:

Vyncke, W.; Luten, J.; Moermans, R.: Determination of total volatile bases in fish: a collaborative study by the West European Fish Technologists' Association (WEFTA). *Z. Lebensm. Unters. Forsch.* 184: 110–114, 1987

Bon, J.; Brüner, K. K.; Aitken, A.: Determination of fish core content in coated products: Interlaboratory WEFTA studies of three procedures. *J. Assoc. Off. Anal. Chem.* 69: 75–79, 1986

Antonacopoulos, N.; Vyncke, W.: Determination of volatile basic nitrogen in fish: a third collaborative study by the West European Fish Technologists' Association (WEFTA). *Z. Lebensm. Unters. Forsch.* 189: 309–316, 1989

Luten, J.; Bouquet, W.; Oehlenschläger, J.; Meetschen, U.; Etienne, M.; Stroud, G.; Bykowski, P.; Batista, I.; Vyncke, W.; Stefansson, G.: An intercomparison study of the determination of sulfite in tropical shrimps by the West European Fish Technologists' Association (WEFTA). *Z. Lebensm. Unters. Forsch.* 204: 237–240, 1997

Oehlenschläger, J.: WEFTA interlaboratory comparison on nitrogen determination by Kjeldahl digestion in fishery products and standard substances. *Inf. Fischw.* 44: 31–37, 1997

The meetings for the next years are scheduled for Lisbon (1999) and Copenhagen (2000).
