

AQUACULTURE NEWS

Bureaucracy and technology problems behind low European abalone production

By Anna Soler Vila,
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THE farming of abalone species began in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Japan and China and over the last 20 years, production has increased worldwide.

In Europe however, production is restricted by the lack of reasonably priced juveniles, technological problems, and legislative issues.

The opportunity presented by the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development — the EU's main instrument for funding research in Europe — provides the partners in SUDEVAB (Sustainable Development of European SMEs engaged in Abalone Aquaculture) with exactly the right vehicle to develop this young European aquaculture sector, by harnessing some of the best shellfish aquaculture research facilities and researchers to solve the significant technological problems facing producers, increasing production and competitiveness.

SUDEVAB has been designed by SMEs that are participating in the development of sustainable abalone aquaculture systems for the European abalone *Haliotis tuberculata*. The workforce involves Aqua-Gold (Fisheries) GmbH (Germany), France Haliotis (France), South West Abalone Growers Association (SWAGA) (UK) and Jersey Sea Farms (Ireland and Channel Islands).



● Farmed abalone

The two year research project aims to solve the main technical problems encountered by abalone growers in the areas of genetics, pathology, nutrition and sustainable culture technology.

This will be carried out by

the RTD members involved in the project: GIA (Gran Canaria), IEO (Galicia), IFREMER and CNRS (France) and the Irish Seaweed Centre (Ireland).

Understanding the genetic structure of wild stocks will help us to understand their geographical distribution and the population dynamics of these species.

Any improvement in the understanding of the composition of genetic structures found in abalone populations will allow analysis of the relative resistance of individuals to pathogens and the mastering of

selective breeding for major traits of interest in abalone growers.

This in turn will help to avoid inbreeding problems within the farmed population such as those currently facing Irish producers.

Other areas that need to be addressed include: legislation, hygiene and food safety together with marketing issues. All these are blended in the research project to maximise the results and raise awareness of the project as a whole.

The Irish Seaweed Centre will review European algae



● Abalone feeding on seaweed

according to their abundance and suitability for abalone farming.

Moreover, seaweed cultivated under enriched conditions will be analysed and will be compared nutritionally to the wild stocks in collaboration with GIA in Gran Canaria.

The ISC will also carry out seasonal measurement of the abalone growing in the different sea cage designs of the SME partners.

Other collaborators of the project are Sylter Algenfarm (Germany), Tower Aqua Products (Rep. of Ireland) and

Federation of European Aquaculture producers (Belgium, France).

SUDEVAB via the Industrial Consultancy Group (ICG) will have a direct link to more than 500 shellfish producers in Ireland, Britain, France and Spain. Representatives from these associations will be invited to attend a general meeting and will also receive the promotional material generated by the project.

For further information visit www.sudevab.eu

Biotoxin investigation nears completion

By Gery Flynn

THE Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority (SFPA) has indicated that its investigation at Bantry Bay Seafoods 'has advanced significantly'.

In a statement to *Inshore Ireland* the SFPA declares that it 'has devoted significant resources to examining available evidence gathered as part of its extensive investigation with a view to identifying potential breaches of legislation [and] the information gathering has largely reached its conclusion.'

Noting that 'whilst no specific legal proceedings have been issued to date', the statement points out that the Food Safety Authority of Ireland Act 'requires prosecutions to be initiated within 12 months from when the SFPA became aware of an incident.'

The statement concludes: 'The SFPA maintains an ongoing role of official control of this establishment, and all seafood establishments to verify compliance with food law.'

Background

The SFPA launched its seven month investigation in March after the French authorities de-

clared an EU Rapid Alert when more than two hundred people showed symptoms of toxic poisoning that was later linked to a batch of Irish farmed mussels processed by Bantry Bay Seafoods.

The toxin was later identified as azaspiracid — a so-called marine biotoxin first isolated in November 1995 when 12 people became ill in The Netherlands after eating mussels from Killary Harbour.

Detection areas

Since then azaspiracid has been detected in several other shellfish production areas in Ireland including Arranmore Island, Bruckless Bay, Clew Bay, Bantry Bay, Lough Foyle and Cork Harbour. The source of the toxin is thought to be Protoperidinium, a tiny marine dinoflagellate. It is widely accepted in the mussel farming sector here that this episode was unusual and did not result from deficiencies in the National Biotoxin Monitoring Programme.

This latest statement comes in the wake of comments by SFPA executive director Peter Whelan and already reported in this newspaper that the investigation had been "very detailed

and thorough".

Whelan said that it had been "swiftly and comprehensively executed" and that the SFPA was satisfied with its progress.

He added that the SFPA was determined to discover why apparently unsafe food was placed on the market in the first place.

"We have also examined potential breaches of legislation that might have occurred. The investigation is now collating all the evidence gathered with a view to initiating proceedings which will be progressed through the courts," he told *Inshore Ireland*.

Legislation breached

He added that where serious breaches of food safety legislation have been identified and where there was sufficient proof to support a prosecution case, it was SFPA policy to initiate prosecutions.

"The SFPA is committed to carrying out its regulatory role in an open and transparent manner," Whelan said. "And with regard to the case at hand, the SFPA will follow due process fully and will communicate any salient lessons learned."

He added that the public

"could be assured" that the investigation so far has been "robust and well resourced" and driven from the highest level within the SFPA, with the specific emphasis on protecting public health.

"There will be no fudging of the findings in this case. The SFPA has always publicised in a comprehensive fashion the outcomes of legal actions it has taken in the interest of transparency and as part of our mandate to deter future contraventions," he concluded.

Response

Inshore Ireland invited Bantry Bay Seafoods to contribute to this article and it responded as follows:

Bantry Bay Seafoods continues to work with all the Government's agencies to ensure Irish mussel product is of the highest standards, and has worked with all the relevant agencies throughout the summer to achieve this.

Production and exporting of product from Bantry Bay Seafoods is continuing apace and the company has recently achieved Grade A - BRC (Version 5) and Higher Level IFS Food Certification.'



Irish Association of Seafood Companies

The Irish Association of Seafood Companies (IASC) develops, promotes and represents the interests of independent seafood processors and retailers in Ireland.

If you're interested in joining our ever-expanding network, contact Martina Clarke for further information.

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