Final decision by Japan on ethoxyquin in shrimp by Feb

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The Japanese health ministry has provisionally fixed the maximum residue limit (MRL) of ethoxyquin in shrimp, crucial for Indian exports to that country. A committee of the ministry has approved to fix the MRL at 0.2 ppm (parts per million) in crustaceans, including the farmed shrimp. The new MRL will be notified for comments from public and in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) according to the procedure.

The final MRL announcement is expected by Feb 2014. The decision will clear the stalemate on exports and would further augment India’s shrimp exports to Japan.

Japan had enforced default level of 0.01 ppm for ethoxyquin in shrimp from India and Vietnam in July 2012. The issue was immediately taken up with the Japanese authorities by the Indian government, Marine Products Export Development Authority (Mpeda) and the Indian Embassy in Tokyo citing lack of scientific reasoning behind their action.

Based on this, the Japan government had referred the matter to the Food Safety Commission under the Cabinet secretariat to assess and recommend the accepted daily intake (ADI) of ethoxyquin in shrimp.

The issue was also taken up at various bilateral meetings. The sub-committee of the Food Safety Commission had fixed the ADI for ethoxyquin as 0.0083 milligram per kg body weight in its meeting in November this year.

The Japanese Health Ministry discussed and approved MRLs for 11 parameters and noticed the assessment period for ethoxyquin took only about a year in comparison with assessment period which varied from 5-10 years for many other parameters. Ethoxyquin is primarily used as an antioxidant preservative in animal or shrimp feed.

Japan's decision had stalled India’s shrimp export to that country during July-Sept period. It had rejected several containers from India and this had badly hit the shrimp production in West Bengal and Odisha. It started rejecting consignments testing negative from July 2012. Exports from Odisha and West Bengal dropped more than 50 per cent during that period. With this, exports to Japan dropped 10.67 per cent in volume and 6.59 per cent in value terms during 2012-13. Total exports were 76,648 tonne, valued at Rs 1,999 crore as against 85,800 tonne valued at Rs 2140 crore in 2011-12.

Mpeda chairperson Leena Nair and SK Saxena, director of Export Inspection Council, visited Japan and
discussed the issue with the Japanese authorities.

The aquaculture sector in the eastern parts of India was in a bad shape during that period as a major chunk of black tiger shrimp produced here is exported to Japan. More than 60 per cent of the production goes to Japan.

Due to this, India suffered serious setback in exports and has lost its sheen in Europe and USA. Anwar Hashim, former president of Seafood Export Association of India said Europe, America, Japan and China had lowered their buying, thanks to economic recession.

The latest decision would provide a clarity on the issue and was likely to help exporters and farmers take precaution on the content of ethoxyquin, he added.