

Press Release

Warn before blacklisting seafood exporters, India asks EU

Margao, Jan 29: India today urged the European Union not to ban or blacklist any seafood exporter immediately after finding problems with just one consignment as this extreme step worked against the interests of all the stakeholders – importers, grassroots farmers, importers and consumers in the EU, besides the exporter concerned.

“EU should issue a warning to the exporter and give them reasonable time to remove the inadequacies before delisting the company,” Dr A Jayathilak, Chairman of Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), said while chairing the EU-India Shrimp Dialogue organized in association with the Embassy of the Netherlands.

Instant blacklisting was unjust as this also destroyed the exporters’ reputation built over several years and jeopardized their huge investments in the cost-intensive business besides the livelihood of lakhs of farmers, he said.

The session was part of the three-day 21st India International Seafood Show 2018 organised jointly by MPEDA and Seafood Export Association of India (SEAI) from January 27 to 29.

MPEDA Chairman also described as unfair the EU’s decision to increase the sample size from 10 per cent to 50 per cent for testing the seafood consignments from India, while keeping it at 10 per cent for other exporting countries.

Endorsing Dr Jayathilak’s pleas, SEAI General Secretary Mr Elias Sait said the sample size was being kept at 10 per cent even for Vietnam and Bangladesh whose consignments also failed the food safety tests.

Mr Wojciech Dziowrski, Counsellor for health and food safety for the EU delegation to India, countered this view citing the number of samples tested positive from India and these two countries. But Mr Sait said these countries could not be compared in terms of failed sample numbers as India’s volume of export was quite high and the sample size was five times higher.

Pointing to the case of a recently blacklisted exporter, Mr Sait said the company was suffering despite the fact that about 600 consignments sent by it to the EU over several years were in perfect order. EU had brought his entire business, involving an investment of Rs 50 crore, to a standstill by delisting his company after one of his consignments failed the quality test.

Export Inspection Council (EIC) Director Dr S K Saxena regretted that the twin-blow — instant ban and 50 per cent sample size — was in place despite the fact that the quality control mechanism had been tightened further in the last two years. Some of the blacklisting was done on the basis of miniscule variations from the food quality benchmark. He also wanted the relisting to take place in suitable cases within a short time.

Mr. Willem Van Der Pijl, representing the Seafood Trade Intelligence Portal (STIP), moderated the discussions. Dr Jayathilak and Mr Sait said the first India-EU Shrimp Dialogue provided a forum for a “free, frank and candid” discussion aimed at finding a solution to the problems being faced by all the stakeholders.

At another technical session, Dr Saxena said India was in the process of asking EU to relist the wrongly delisted companies and let them resume their business. He made the statement in response to concerns raised by seafood associations of Kerala and West Bengal that a number of companies delisted by EU due to wrong testing by labs in importing countries were suffering for no fault of theirs.

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A number of consignments rejected by importing countries in Europe for allegedly containing banned antibiotics and chemical substances beyond permissible limits were found to be in order during further tests conducted in Indian laboratories, the associations said.

Dr Saxena suggested that exporters convince the importing companies in EU to get the failed samples tested in one more lab to prevent wrong rejections.

A farmers' representative of the farmers involved in shrimp farming suggested that quality tests should be conducted at the farm level, instead of after the processing was over. Farmers were blamed even in cases where the processing sector was at fault, he said.

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