



# Data analysis of official checks on intra-EU seafood trade: A survey on the Italian veterinary office for compliance with EU requirement (UVAC) of Tuscany in three-year period 2014–2016

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Official control  
Veterinary offices for compliance with EU requirement (UVAC)  
Seafood  
Chemical risks  
Biological risks  
Consumer protection

## ABSTRACT

European food law states that official checks on goods exchanged within the community should be performed at the place of origin, trusting in the guarantees provided by the supplier Member State. However, spot checks at the destination are also allowed. The Veterinary Offices for Compliance with EU Requirement (UVAC) are uniquely Italian offices implementing destination controls on EU products of animal origin. In this study, a data analysis on the control activity of the UVAC of Tuscany on seafood products in the period 2014–2016 was performed. Consignments were analysed according to their category (fish, fillets, crustaceans, molluscs, processed products) and country origin and data on seafood market flows were provided. Checks performed on consignments were investigated and cases of non-compliances with the EU standard safety requirements were analysed. Fish category was the most representative (49%), followed by molluscs (24%), fillets (12%), crustaceans (8%) and processed seafood (5%) and consignments were mainly provided by Spain, France and Netherlands. These outcomes were relatively in accordance with national and European data. The percentage of checked consignments was higher than the national one, although decreasing (from 0.73% in 2014 to 0.57% in 2016). 26 consignments (3.4% of the total checked) were found as non-compliant with the standard EU requirements: 12 (46.2%) involved chemical risks (mercury, additives), 9 involved biological risks (*L. monocytogenes*, *Anisakis spp.*, *Norovirus*), and 5 involved physical risks and other minor irregularities. These outcomes proved the actual usefulness of ancillary checks performed at national level in protecting consumers' health and even represents a further data source for evaluating EU citizens risk exposure.

## 1. Introduction

European food law is overall targeted at citizens' health protection and goods' free movement within the Single Market (Alemanno, 2006). EU rules regarding food hygiene, aimed at ensuring food safety from production to consumption, are reported in key acts (known as EU Hygiene Package) related to the principles and requirements provided by the EC General Food Law (Regulation (EC) No 178/2002). Member States (MSs) are responsible for the legislation enforcement and Competent Authorities (CA) are assigned to organise official controls systems on their territory to verify that Food Business Operators (FBOs) activities and goods placed on the internal market (either EU produced or imported from non-EU countries) comply with EU requirements and safety standards. Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 and Regulation (EC) No

854/2004 currently define principles and tools of official controls on food and animal feed, although they will be repealed by the new Regulation (EU) No 2017/625 starting from 14th December 2019.

Among foodstuff of animal origin, imports of live animals and animal products from extra-EU countries are specifically controlled by veterinaries checks at their point of entry, so called Veterinary Border Inspection Posts (BIPs). Contrariwise, for the intra-Union trade, which solely refers to the movement of live animal or animal products between MSs, the EU system is based on the confidence in the guarantees provided by the supplier country and the official checks should be therefore carried out at the place of origin. However, non-discriminatory spot checks at the final destination are allowed (Council Directive 89/662/EEC).

The Veterinary Offices for Compliance with EU Requirement

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(UVAC) are peripheral offices of the Italian Ministry of Health which maintain the responsibility of destination controls on EU products of animal origin, animal by-products, live animals and their productions at national level. Seventeen UVAC are currently distributed throughout Italian land and each of them has a territorial competence covering one or two region/s. They have been set up with the [Legislative Decree No 27 of 30 January 1993](#) implementing the [Council Directive 89/608/EEC](#), in response to the launch of the EU Single Market and the abolition of border controls between MSs. Differently from the BIPs veterinary controls that are mandatory and therefore performed by all the MSs, the UVAC checks are purely Italian activities. Basically, UVAC priority tasks refer to: (i) setting the control percentages depending on the goods type and provenience; (ii) applying restrictive measures issued by Health Ministry, in co-ordination with Regional Veterinary Services (RVS) and Local Veterinary Units (LVUs); (iii) Co-ordinating and verifying the consistency of the control activities performed by LVUs, in cooperation with the regions; (iv) Managing the information flows relating to the intra-Union exchanged goods; (v) providing technical and legislative advices in cases of Community's legal disputes ([Legislative Decree No 28 of 30 January, 1993](#)). Undoubtedly, a proper knowledge of the trade flows from MSs is required for carrying out the above-mentioned tasks. Thus, the recipient FBOs should electronically pre-notify the arrival of the goods consignments to the respective UVAC and LVU through the Trade and Imports Integrated System, with the Italian acronym "S.INTE.S.I.S".

Seafood has long been considered an important sustenance source on the Italian scene, supported by current per-capita average consumption that, reaching 28.4 kg in 2014, has overcome the average consumption of European citizens ([FAO, 2016a](#)). According to the most updated national data, provided by the Italian Ministry of Health through annual reports, a high amount of pre-notified imported products is represented by seafood, with percentages ranging from 38% to 42% of the total EU imported foodstuff consignments in the three-years period 2014–2016 ([Italian Ministry of Health, 2014](#); [Italian Ministry of Health, 2015](#); [Italian Ministry of Health, 2016](#)).

In the same reports, cases of non-conformities assessment, related to an actual non-compliance of the products with the standard safety and quality requirements, are reported. The potential public health risks arising from non-compliant seafood have long been known and they are especially related to the presence of biological (e.g. bacteria, virus, parasites, biotoxins, histamine) and chemical (e.g. heavy metals, PCB, dioxins, PAHs, additives, residues of veterinary drugs) hazards ([D'Amico et al., 2018](#)). Efficient and consistent checks are therefore particularly required to guarantee consumers' protection and they should be even carried out on goods checked at BIPs located in other MSs but intended to the Italian territory.

In this study, a comprehensive data analysis on the control activity performed by the UVAC of Tuscany on imported EU seafood products in the three-year period 2014–2016 was performed. The main outcomes emerging from the study were assessed in the light of the European and national data related to the same period. Cases of non-compliances with the standard safety requirements and the relative adopted measures were analysed to implement the knowledge on EU citizens risk exposure and assess the actual usefulness of ancillary checks performed at national level in protecting consumers' health. Finally, considering that accurate and reliable data gathering is a prerequisite for informed risk assessment and risk management, the study also sought to provide additional data on intra-EU seafood market flows.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Data collection and analysis

Data on seafood consignments that have been pre-notified to the S.INTE.S.I.S intended to be dispatched to Tuscany region and that have been the subject of veterinary checks under the UVAC of Tuscany in the

three-year period from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2016 were collected and re-organised in an Excel worksheet. For each consignment, the items reported in the following sections were considered.

#### 2.1.1. Type of product and product's origin

Seafood consignments were divided in five macro-categories according to the Common Customs Tariff Combined Nomenclature (CN), the [Council Regulation \(EEC\) No 2658/87](#) and its following amendments: 1) Fish (F): live fish and fresh, chilled, frozen fish (except fish fillets); 2) Fillets (Fi): fresh, chilled, frozen fish fillets/other fish flesh (even minced); 3) Crustaceans (C): live crustaceans, fresh/chilled/frozen/dried/salted/in brine crustaceans (whole or shelled), boiled or steamed whole crustaceans (fresh/chilled/frozen/dried/salted), prepared or preserved crustaceans, crustaceans' meal, powder or pellets; 4) Molluscs (M): live molluscs, fresh/chilled/frozen/dried/salted/in brine molluscs (whole or shelled), molluscs' meal; 5) Processed seafood (P): dried/salted/in brine fish or fish fillets; smoked fish (even cooked), prepared or preserved fish, fish meal, powder or pellets, caviar and other fish roe preparations, packaged mixed seafood (chilled or frozen), fish/crustaceans/molluscs sauces) and counted. M category was further sub-divided into a) "bivalves", b) "cephalopods" c) "gastropods" and d) "mixed".

Consignments imported from MSs and EU Free Trade Association (EFTA) States were considered.

Outcomes from this section were compared to data on seafood imports provided by both the *EU Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products* (EUMOFA) and the *Italian Institute of Services for the Agricultural Food Market* (ISMEA) related to the same three-years period.

#### 2.1.2. Type of UVAC veterinary check

The overall number of veterinary checks and the number for each type of check were calculated. The checks were divided in planned (annually set up by UVAC for LVUs and based on the products' risk assessment) and extra-planned according to [Legislative Decree No 28 of 30 January, 1993](#) implementing the [Council Directive 89/662/EEC](#) and subsequent amendments. Extra-planned checks further included: a) mandatory checks - implemented as a result of the *Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed* (RASFF) alert notifications or for ascertained non-compliances, b) checks for suspicion - implemented if, in absence of specific alerts, doubts existed as the actual consignment's safety or as its notice time's correctness, or as a result of Italian Ministry of Health specific dispositions and c) LVU monitoring checks - implemented by LVU in presence of suspects during the internal surveillance.

#### 2.1.3. Type of controls made on consignments

The number of each following type of controls, commonly performed by UVAC, was calculated: documentary checks, identity checks, physical checks, all defined by [Regulation \(CE\) n. 882/2004](#); moreover, also the laboratory checks performed by Italian official laboratories (Experimental Zooprophyllactic Institutes) on samples taken from the consignments were included.

### 2.2. Non-compliances evaluation

Final non-compliances (NC) were calculated. For non-compliant consignments, the type of non-compliance and the measures implemented to protect food safety were investigated.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Data collection and analysis

Seafood consignments (N = 119896) represented the 43% in 2014 (N = 37162), 44% in 2015 (N = 39632) and 47% in 2016 (N = 43102) of the total consignments composed of products of animal origin,

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