

ETHOXYQUIN as anti-oxidant in fish feeds - FACTS

June 2014

Introduction

Concerns have been reported in different media on the presence of the antioxidant feed additive ethoxyquin (E 324) in farmed fish, thereby speculating that eating such fish could be unhealthy. This fact sheet aims to clarify the position of the use and effects of ethoxyquin.

What is ethoxyquin ?

Ethoxyquin is a quinoline-based antioxidant. Antioxidants are commonly used in the feed and food industry to protect the raw materials and final products against oxidation (rancidity) in general, these are used to protect oil and fat products, vitamins and amino acids so as to avoid nutrient deficiencies in feeds.

Why use ethoxyquin ?

Fish meal and fish oil used in fish feed manufacture are very rich in highly unsaturated fatty acids. These materials are highly sensitive to oxidation and, thus, require protection.

It is a legal requirement of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to add the antioxidant to fishmeal - prior to shipping - to ensure safe transportation and storage of this product.

EU regulation/position

Ethoxyquin (E 324) was authorised as a feed additive as antioxidant for all species under the conditions of Directive 70/249 but with a limitation on the quantity to be used in feed. The European Union set a combined upper limit for ethoxyquin and other antioxidants (BHT and BHT) of 1 (mg/kg) of feed, with obligatory labelling conditions. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations published a list¹ of commonly-used chemical preservatives that are generally recognised as being safe, including ethoxyquin, for use in fish feeds. Ethoxyquin has been demonstrated to be the most efficacious, followed closely by BHT and BHA.

As an authorised additive, it is subject to the re-evaluation procedure under EU Regulation 1831/2003². Ethoxyquin was considered by the European Commission as one of the priority substances in its re-evaluation process, in agreement with the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Following a request for re-authorisation of ethoxyquin in feed, a scientific assessment by EFSA is ongoing. During this assessment, all animal, human and environmental issues are identified and examined.

Currently, there are no Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for ethoxyquin in fish and fishery products and in other food of animal origin nor are there any restrictions with use as feed additive, setting MRLs may be achieved, taking into account the outcome of the EFSA opinion.

Application of the organic agriculture Regulation³ uses a list of positive feed additives in which ethoxyquin is not included.