

Press Release from Ocean Quality:

Suspends two employees due to misinformation

(Bergen, 13. February 2018) **The export company Ocean Quality AS has suspended two employees after the Norwegian Food Safety Authority uncovered incorrect use of documentation. The company now works closely with Norwegian Authorities and has reviewed and improved internal guidelines to prevent such incidents from happening again.**

On the 31st of January 2018, Ocean Quality AS received a decision from the Norwegian Food Safety Authority to suspend all exports of Norwegian salmon from the company to China. The Food Safety Authority has received incorrect documentation from the company regarding shipments of salmon exported to China. The decision is based on an inspection at Bremnes Seashore AS on the 25th and 26th of January.

“According to the information Oceans Quality AS has, individuals in Ocean Quality AS have, in violation of the company's guidelines, deliberately re-used former personal declaration forms. The consequence is that the Norwegian Food Safety Authority has issued export certificates on an incorrect basis, and Ocean Quality AS has exported salmon to China that was not approved for China,” states Øyvind Fossøy, chairman of Ocean Quality AS.

The salmon that was exported to China with incorrect documentation has had the disease PD. Most countries, including Norway, have no restrictions on fish that have had this disease. However, China does not accept imports of fish that have had PD. This requirement is based on fish welfare, and has nothing to do with food safety. The salmon is safe to eat.

According to the information Ocean Quality has today, export of mislabeled fish has been going on for a period of a few weeks.

Has taken action

“We take this incident very seriously. We have zero tolerance for incorrect use of documentation, and we deeply apologize for what has happened. Ocean Quality AS has suspended two employees, who according to what we know today have been involved in the incident,” says Fossøy.

Following the Food Safety Authority's inspection, Ocean Quality AS has conducted a complete review of its routines and export systems to find out how such incorrect documentation could occur.

“Based on the review, we have taken measures to ensure that this will not happen again. We have, among other things, improved routines for personal declarations and internal controls. Employees who work with export to China have been trained in the new routines. We have reported the measures taken to the Norwegian Food Safety Authority and we have a close dialogue with them. Everybody should be able to trust that our fish is what we say it is,” Fossøy states.

From what Ocean Quality AS knows today, neither the company nor the employees involved have had any financial gain due to the misinformation.

Shows that the Norwegian control system works

Ocean Quality AS is now collaborating with the Norwegian Food Safety Authority and the police, which investigates whether there is a breach of the Food Act and whether the Authorities have been given incorrect information.

“We cooperate closely with Norwegian Authorities to get all the facts on the table. When we have a complete picture, we need to consider whether we should implement additional measures,” says Fossøy.

Ocean Quality AS is thankful to the Norwegian Food Safety Authority for discovering the incorrect use of documentation.

“This incident shows that the Authorities's control system works. They have enabled us to immediately clean up and improve our routines,” Fossøy states.

Ocean Quality AS states that, according to the information currently available, everything indicates that the incorrect use of documentation has been done by Ocean Quality AS employees alone. The company regrets that Bremnes Seashore AS has been involved in the incident.

Ocean Quality AS has suspended all exports to China so far, following orders from the Norwegian Food Safety Authority. Ocean Quality AS will provide more information when available.

The board of Ocean Quality AS stands behind all statements by Chairman Øyvind Fossøy.