

As a result, refrigerated facilities are well established throughout the country. In every fishing port, in transit stations, and in consuming cities, large refrigerators are equipped with freezing machines, though smaller refrigerators may lack these facilities. The Japanese have traditionally used wooden boxes to transport fish. However there is a very strong move towards lighter and more sanitary boxes made out of cardboard or styrofoam. Seafood is packed in the cartons, chilled with ice or frozen.

Refrigerated warehouse facilities are available at seaports where bonded facilities are located near markets and in inland areas where they serve as regional distribution centres. Fisheries products made up almost 50 % of the products destined for refrigerated warehouse storage.

### **PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS AND INSPECTION STANDARDS**

Quality is judged by many factors in the Japanese fishery market. The more important factors include freshness, colour, meat quality, texture, taste, smell, external appearance, and size. The various factors vary depending on the type of fish, however, bright colours (e.g. red) are generally preferred, and faded colours should be avoided, particularly in the case of sea bream and rock fish. Packaging also needs to be a high priority. The Japanese interpret the quality of the packaging as indicative of the product quality. Sanitation and cleanliness is also critical. In an effort to avoid problems in this area the fish needs to be handled in a sanitary manner from catch through processing, packing, preservation and transport. Once a poor reputation for quality is established it is difficult for the firm to access the market.

Care needs to be taken during the handling, processing and packaging stages to avoid the loss of scales, damage to the tail and deformed bodies. Otherwise it will be graded at a lower quality. In Japan, fish is often served whole to one person. This is so particularly during special ceremonial occasions and banquets, therefore the size of the fish is also an important criteria in grading. Each species has a preferred size and those outside the desired size are evaluated negatively. As an example, capelin, sized "35 and under" are the sizes preferred by Japanese buyers.

To date there are no regulations on the proper labelling and displaying of information on the quality of fishery products. Labelling is currently left to the discretion of retailers. However with increasing consumer concern regarding preservatives and other additives, the Fisheries Agency is in the process of preparing guidelines for labelling on quality which will cover whether the product is fresh, frozen or thawed; whether additives/preservatives were used; the product origin; as well as whether the product is farmed or sea caught. A 10-member committee comprising academics and industry representatives, is expected to study the present practice of labelling and the quality of fish and draft new guidelines based on the survey results.

### **INSPECTION STANDARDS**

The Japanese Food Inspection Law sets out regulations governing health standards for all food products as well as specific requirements which have to be met before products are permitted into the market. There are specific regulations regarding additive content in fish. The Ministry of Health and Welfare publishes "Food Sanitation Law: Food Additives in Japan" which outlines permissible additives. Chemical tolerances are applied to mercury and PCB's, for example the tolerance for total mercury is 0.4 PPM and for methyl mercury 0.03 PPM. The tolerance level for PCB's is 0.5 PPM. Processed food is inspected for three different criteria: bacteriological content, chemical content, and appearance.