

LOBSTER

No lobster is produced in the Netherlands so that requirements must be imported. However, purchases are not made solely for the local market, a good part of the lobster that comes in is for export, mainly to neighbouring countries. This is typical of the Netherlands and its highly developed "gateway-to-Europe" function. Apparent consumption of lobster based on import and export figures has shown an erratic pattern over the past three years. While imports in 1989 and 1990 jumped, in relative terms exports lagged behind indicating substantial increases in consumption. The year 1991 marked a dramatic change in this trend, imports went up less strongly, but exports soared by as much as 70% resulting in a notable drop in consumption. In 1992, however, the export share dropped to 57% and apparent domestic consumption recovered to a record of 574 tonnes. The Dutch are modest buyers of popsicle lobster. The market for frozen lobster parts and meat is negligible mainly due to the uncomfortably high import duty set by the EC (16% and 20% respectively) and unfamiliarity with these types of products. The bulk of the lobster consumed in the Netherlands is still eaten in restaurants. Total imports of live lobster for 1992 were 1,335 tonnes valued at CDN \$18,118,500.

Large importers of fresh lobster have their own basins where the lobsters are given a chance to "de-stress" after their flight. From there the lobsters are sold to regional distributors and wholesale supermarkets both locally and abroad, especially Belgium. One large Dutch importer is known to buy on behalf of companies in France, and thus benefits from discount prices for combined consignments (even involving a charter flight in the pre-Christmas season). Smaller importers with limited holding facilities cater to the restaurant trade and retail outlets in their areas rather than covering the whole market. For frozen lobster, popsicle lobster is usually bought in containerloads and distributed by the importer directly to retailers, both supermarkets and specialty fish stores. Lobster parts and meat as institutional products would be sold through wholesale supermarkets, which cater for a good part to the restaurant trade. Purchasing abroad in this case could be direct or through an importer.

The duties currently applicable to imports of live lobster and lobster products into the Netherlands from Canada and other non-EC sources are as follows: live lobster (8%); frozen popsicle lobster (8%); frozen lobster parts (16%); frozen lobster meat (20%); and, canned lobster meat (20%). The duties are payable on the C.I.F. value of shipments. The Dutch V.A.T. on the above items currently stands at 6%, the V.A.T. is levied on the duty-paid value.

The Commercial Division of the Canadian Embassy in The Hague has actively participated in lobster promotions undertaken by a major local importer and, in recent years, a leading wholesale supermarket operation. These promotions up until now have focused on the hotel/restaurant and catering trades chiefly because it is felt that the higher the number of places where lobster is served, the greater the interest of local consumers will be in buying lobster for preparation at home. Local promotions on an annual basis would help to ensure continuity and sustain effectiveness. The interest and active support of the New Brunswick Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture in ongoing promotions in conjunction with a wholesale supermarket organization deserves special mention in this regard. The manner in which the Dutch fisheries trade is organized and operates, does not lend itself to missions from Canada. Even participation in local fish trade shows probably would not be cost-effective against the background of a small country with a relatively large number of importers and traders, each of whom as a rule does not want his competitors to know whom he buys from, at which prices, and in which volumes. In other words, secretiveness generally prevails.