Big catch for Merlус

By Kirsten Manasterny, Justine Tjmune, Riette van Zyl and Ismet Kara

By combining ISO 14001 (environmental management), ISO 22000 (food safety management), OHSAS 18001 (occupational health and safety) and the British Retail Consortium food safety standard, Merlus Seafood Processors of Namibia is now gaining greater customer confidence in global markets, and has developed a culture of continual improvement.

Merlus Seafood Processors (MSP) is a state-of-the-art fish processing factory situated in Walvis Bay, Namibia, which started production in 2003. The company converts bulk sea-frozen fish into retail products sold under the Mascato brand, mainly to supermarkets in Spain.

In 2007, MSP was chosen to conduct a pilot ISO 14001 environmental management system (EMS) implementation project, as a result of an initiative by the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism Directorate of Environmental Affairs, supported by the Danish International Development Agency (Danida), aimed at promoting cleaner production in the country.

With the help of a consultant from the Fishing Industry Research Institute (FIRI), MSP completed the process, including training the company’s 120 employees and establishing documentation and procedures, and achieved certification to 14001:2004, Environmental management systems – Requirements with guidance for use, by December 2007.

Competing globally

ISO 14001 became the foundation and starting point of a programme which would combine the EMS standard with ISO 22000:2005, Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain, OHSAS 18001, the international occupational health and safety management system specification, and the British Retail Consortium (BRC) food safety standard (see Box on page 30).

ISO 22000 and BRC certifications were achieved in July 2008, with OHSAS 18001 certification following in April 2010.

For MSP, as a developing country-based company, certification to internationally recognized standards is key to achieve a competitive edge in global markets. MSP’s ISO 14001 and ISO 22000 certifications, in addition to OHSAS 18001 and BRC, give customers confidence in its products and the company.

Getting started

From the beginning, MSP implemented ISO 14001 as a team effort with different departments being represented – it was never a “one man show”.

As the MSP ISO 14001 implementing team, the greatest challenge we experienced was simply to get started. The standard and its requirements seemed daunting at first. However the FIRI consultant made it easier for us by guiding the team in writing policies, procedures and work instructions for the EMS manual.

ISO 14001 does not impose itself on its users, instead, it gave MSP the tools and guidelines to write its own version. That enabled us to identify ourselves with the system and have a sense of ownership.

Another advantage was the full commitment of MSP top management to implementing the different systems, and to providing the necessary resources. MSP was also driven by the fact that its largest customer in Spain made ISO 14001 certification a requirement of doing business. However, the company decided to implement ISO 22000, BRC and OHSAS 18001 on its own initiative. The ISO 14001 team is still in operation, but now consists of three leaders, each responsible for a specific system.
**Intensive training**

The multi-system implementation effort could not have been achieved successfully without the support of the entire workforce. All employees received intensive training from 2007 through 2009 in a series of courses run by internal and external trainers. (see **Figure 1**).

The company also raised employee awareness of the systems and the importance of continual improvement through special activities and events. For example, an ISO 14001 poster competition proved effective in making the workforce think creatively about environmental management.

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**Figure 1** — MSP management systems training 2007-2009

**System compatibility**

Since ISO 14001 and ISO 22000 are so compatible, the team decided to combine them, together with OHSAS and BRC, as far as possible. For example we established an integrated policy for all four systems and applied the following common procedures:

- Document control
- Communication
- Management review
- Corrective action
- Training and employee qualification
- Internal audit
- Compliance audit
- Security
- Procedure for visitors/contractors and service providers
- Procedure for supplier quality assurance.

Combining the different systems enabled us to reduce the number of documents required, and increase internal cooperation.

Some of the winners of the ISO 14001 poster competition, aimed at raising environmental awareness, proudly show their prize diplomas.
Issues arising in different departments can now be handled in a unified way.

In addition to integrating system documentation, we also decided to combine audits to minimize disruption to production. All surveillance and certification audits are carried out by the same certification body, and are concentrated into one week during the year.

Benefits

MSP derives several important benefits from the implemented ISO 14001, OHSAS 8001, ISO 22000 and BRC-based systems. Since certification, our customers have become more confident in our operation and in the quality and safety of our products.

Because of the standards implementation and certification process, MSP is always prepared for any customer or local authority audits, and for any emergency situation that might arise.

We also experience greater teamwork throughout the company. MSP’s working procedures are well structured and formulated, and no longer static. As the company’s systems grow, so its procedures change in a process of continual improvement. ISO 14001, OHSAS 18001, ISO 22000 and BRC help us generate accurate statistical data and enable us to monitor set targets and implement corrective actions if necessary.

Fish portions are put into Mascato brand retail bags, following ISO 22000 food safety requirements.

About ISO 22000 and BRC

ISO 22000:2005, Food safety management systems – Requirements for any organization in the food chain, specifies requirements for a food safety management system, where an organization in the food chain needs to demonstrate its ability to control food related hazards in order to ensure that food is safe at the time of human consumption.

ISO 22000 is an International Standard developed to embody the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which takes several private standards into account, including BRC, to address the management of food safety.

BRC is a private food safety standard created by the British Retail Consortium to help retailers and brand owners produce food products of consistent safety and quality, and assist with their “due diligence” defence, should they be subject to a prosecution by enforcement authorities.

In addition, the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), an over-arching food retailer and manufacturer initiative under the auspices of the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), exists to promote convergence between food safety standards through a benchmarking process.

The BRC standard and its associated assessment scheme has been benchmarked and accepted by the GFSI, as has at least one scheme based on ISO 22000, i.e., food safety management certification FSSC 22000.

About the authors

Dr. Kirsten Manasterny is Systems Manager, Justine Tjimune is Quality Manager and ISO 22000/BRC leader, Riette van Zyl is Logistics Manager and OHSAS 18001 leader and Ismet Kara is Technical Manager and ISO 14000 leader at Namibia-based Merlus Seafood Processors – manufacturers of frozen fish products sold under the Mascato brand to supermarkets in Spain.