

Misleading EU tilapia import statistics

29 December 2013, by Øystein Falch of Inocap, Norway

EU tilapia import statistics for 2012 are misleading because the fish species Pangasius and tilapia have been mixed. Adjusted for Pangasius Inocap estimates tilapia import to the EU in 2012 to 19.000 ton, which equals the volume for 2011.

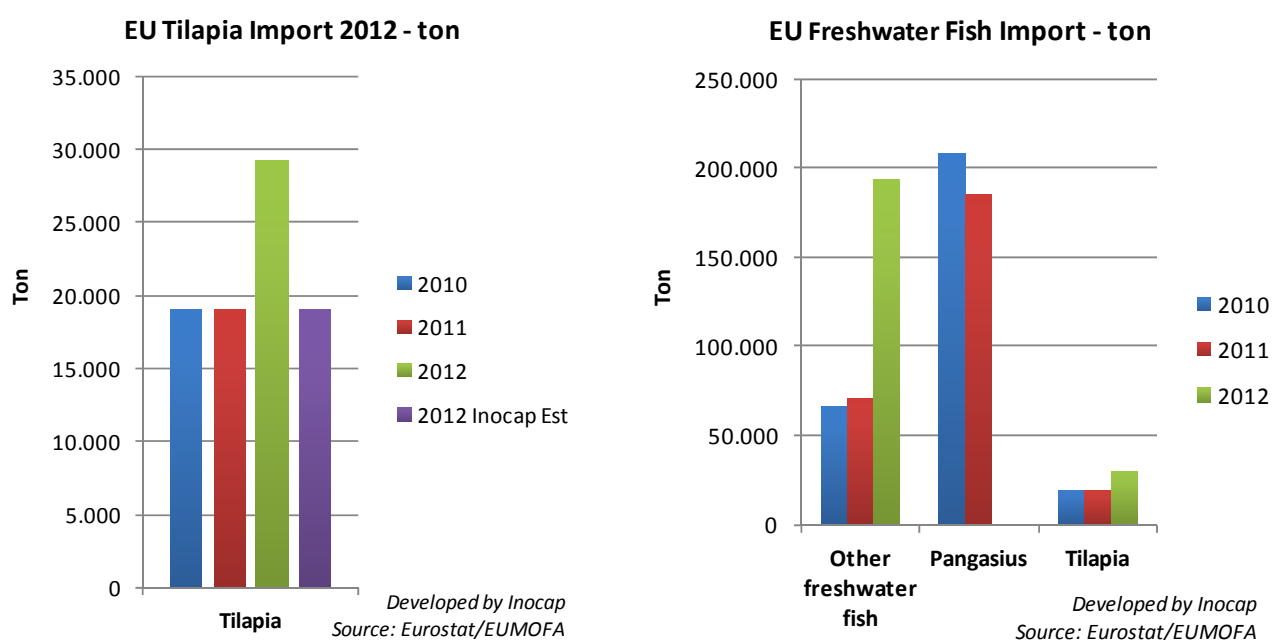
European Union (EU) trade is recorded in the database systems of Eurostat. According to Eurostat statistics, the EU imports of tilapia increased by 53% from 19.000 ton in 2011 to 29.000 ton in 2012. However, the numbers include also the freshwater fish Pangasius.

Data from Eurostat is frequently referred to and used in business planning and decisions. At the World Tilapia Conference in Rio de Janeiro in September 2013, the inflated and misleading numbers were presented in front of a world audience.

Until 2009 Eurostat recorded tilapia and pangasius as 'other freshwater fish' and the only way to estimate EU imports was to look to export statistics of the exporting countries. From 2010 Eurostat started recording tilapia and Pangasius as separate categories, and the industry finally had good and easily accessible import statistics. But it lasted only for two years.

From year 2012 Eurostat made changes to its nomenclature and Pangasius disappeared as a separate category and is reported as 'other freshwater fish' or 'tilapia'.

As shown by the chart to the right below Pangasius disappears in 2012 while the two other categories increase. For the most Pangasius has moved into 'other freshwater fish', but it also interferes with 'tilapia' by about 10.000 ton in 2012.



Analysis of import changes from 2011 to 2012 by country, France and the United Kingdom show a combined increase in tilapia imports of 9.000 ton, and the entire increase seems to be from Pangasius having moved into the 'tilapia' category. For France 'Pangasius' was down -5.300 ton to zero, 'other freshwater fish' down by -1.900 ton and 'tilapia' increased by 5.000 ton. Net change of the three categories

was down by -2.200 ton. In the case of UK, 'Pangasius' was down -9.100 ton to zero, 'other freshwater fish' increased by 3.000 ton and 'tilapia' increased by 4.000 ton. Net change for the three categories was down -2.100 ton.

