

SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNGI ASSOCIATED WITH SMOKE-CURED *ETHMALOSA FIMBRIATA* AND *CLARIAS GARIEPINUS*

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ABSTRACT

Fish species from the vast inland and coastal water bodies of Nigeria are usually smoked to reduce moisture and preserve the fishes for the arduous trips to urban markets. The most common source of deterioration is due to fungal attack. The present study investigated the fungi associated with two commonly smoke-cured fish species, *Ethmalosa fimbriata* and *Clarias gariepinus*. The moisture content of the smoke-dried fishes was between 14.42 and 26.70%, while the fungal count was between 10^5 and 10^6 cfu/g. This placed the fish samples in class B (microbiological status of the food is less than satisfactory but is still acceptable for consumption) of ready-to-eat foods. The fungi species isolated were mainly of the genera *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium* and 37.5 and 25% of these genera were probably toxigenic as they were tested positive for aflatoxin. The fact that these mold species are known producers of potent mycotoxins is significant from a food safety point of view.