On Mondays, staff at the Ho Chi Minh City representative office of Dutch fish importer Anova Food gather for their weekly meeting. The meeting pictured here is chaired by Manager Hoang Thi Kim Tuyet (bottom middle) and starts with an outline of the latest market price movements for sutchi river catfish (Pangasianodon hypophthalmus), commonly known as panga. Other items on this week’s agenda include container shipping prices, factory inspections and customer claims. Out of courtesy to Technical Manager Nicolas Privet, a Frenchman, the meeting is held in English.
10:19–11:10
Quality control meeting

After the general meeting breaks up, Quality Control Manager Mai Thanh Vu (immediately below, left) holds a separate weekly meeting with his three colleagues in the quality control department—Nguyen Thanh Chi Dung (immediately below, right), Nguyen Le Ha (bottom left) and Tran Hoang Nam (bottom right). All four are graduates of Nha Trang Fisheries University in southern central Viet Nam. The meeting, held in Vietnamese, discusses upcoming company visits and audits. They also discuss the coming week’s 10 purchase orders from six different suppliers, which compares with 13 orders from five suppliers a week earlier.
Organoleptic testing involves the use of the sensory organs to assess how fish samples look, smell and taste. On this particular day, the Anova team tests raw and microwave-cooked samples of catfish fillets from three different suppliers in the Mekong Delta. Staff check the quality of the trimming as well as the colour and texture of the flesh. They also check for the presence or absence of water.
The morning is not even over before Manager Kim Tuyet receives her first phone call from Europe. It’s 06:57 in the Netherlands and Frozen Sales Manager Steven Lurvink is calling from his car as he drives to work at the Anova headquarters in Hertogenbosch, about 80 km south of Amsterdam. “He likes to call every morning to know the latest market movements,” she says. Rather than wait another 24 hours for the report to be delivered to his desk, Lurvink is also keen to know the outcome of Monday’s weekly meeting as soon as possible.

11:57–12:06
First call from Europe

The phone calls resume about an hour after lunch, which most staff eat together in the office (12:22–12:44). Purchasing Manager Vo Ly Ly says Vietnamese suppliers usually also hold their own meetings on Mondays to plan their strategy for the week. Although foreign buyers cannot access their computerised quotation system, she’s already spoken to 10 suppliers and has a good “feeling” for the market by early afternoon. Logistics Manager Nguyen Thi Hong The is talking to three shipping companies. Rates from Ho Chi Minh City to Rotterdam are up about 16% from July due to increased shipments to Russia. Assistant Technical Manager Nguyen Minh Hang is more preoccupied with farm processes, helping to oversee Anova’s certification programme, designed to achieve total control of the food supply chain so that each catfish fillet imported to Europe can be traced. Administrator Phan Y Tuong runs the office, also helping out with purchases and shipping documents.