



Fish Welfare at Slaughter

Recommendation – July 2019



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1 Background

The welfare of fish in aquaculture is an essential part of taking a holistic approach to best management practices in aquaculture, and of meeting consumers' expectations. Aquaculture operators across the EU and also in all third countries supplying the EU should be on a level playing field in terms of regulations. Aquaculture operators in the EU should also be on a level playing field in terms of tools and support for the implementation of standards, and consumers should have confidence that fish farmed anywhere in the EU has been farmed to the same high minimum standard. The welfare of fish, the sustainability of aquaculture operations, and the safety of aquaculture operators, are each essential pillars in the development of fish welfare practices.

The time of killing is typically the time in a farm animal's life where welfare is impacted most acutely. While many aspects of the welfare of farmed fish are not well understood, by experts and especially by consumers, practices at the time of killing are relatively well defined scientifically and relatively relatable for consumers. In the case of fishes, the methodology for assessing the effectiveness of stunning is the same as for other animals while the species-specific parameters and commercially available equipment are available only for some species and depending on environmental factors such as the water characteristics. The species-specific knowledge of best practices for related operations including fasting, crowding, and pumping is essential to achieving high welfare and high quality and is only partially available today. Empirical knowledge is generated by a range of experts, and includes that generated by fish farmers in the course of their activities.

2 Work to Date on Welfare at Slaughter

Effective stunning techniques have a long history of development and commercial implementation in the case of some fish species. Use of effective technology is standard practice across the salmon sector, and is used with other species including eel and African catfish. A range of equipment has been widely adopted across Europe's widespread trout sector. Good practice is used in the carp sector, and with other species including kingfish, sea bass and sea bream. Progress towards meeting the objectives of the Regulation by voluntary measures is continuing and electrical stunning equipment is currently being tested around Europe. Research programmes continue to address species specific knowledge gaps and develop technological solutions.

In 2017 the AAC adopted the position paper 'Farmed Fish Welfare During Slaughter in the European Union'¹. The paper contains information on current knowledge and practice, and gives steps in a strategy for optimising fish welfare at slaughter. At the time the Commission was exploring whether it was appropriate to make legislative recommendations, and accepted the AAC position paper as informative.

¹ AAC (2017), *Farmed Fish Welfare During Slaughter in the European Union*.

3 Objectives of this position paper

The Commission has since published the study ‘Welfare of farmed fish: Common practices during transport and at slaughter’ and the subsequent report from the Commission to Parliament and Council (COM(2018) 87 final)². The Commission report concluded that ‘it is not appropriate to propose specific requirements on the protection of fish at the time of killing’. The Commission report identified that ‘improvements are still needed in order to increase welfare of some fish species’ and that ‘the objectives of the Regulation may equally be achieved by voluntary measures’.

This position paper makes specific recommendations that are derived from and consistent with the AAC’s existing position paper, and the findings and conclusions of the Commission’s reports. The recommendations are in support of meeting the objectives of the Regulation³ including voluntary measures.

4 Recommendations

◆ Recommendations to the Commission

● Recommendations to Member State Competent Authorities

	◆	●
Supporting the development of fish slaughter technology.		
Financial and other support available for commercial adoption of higher welfare fish slaughter practices.	✓	✓
Research funding with scope including investigation of stunning parameters and techniques.	✓	✓
Supporting the development of best practices.		
Consolidate knowledge base and identify best practices.	✓	
Identify and prioritise knowledge gaps.	✓	✓
A platform to be identified/established by the Commission for the sharing of best practices, on an ongoing basis, as they are developed by industry, experts, and relevant authorities, eg. EU Animal Welfare Platform.	✓	
Maximising value from best management practices.		
Fish welfare standards in European aquaculture to be recognised and actively promoted to the public.	✓	✓
Ensuring the efficacy and benefits of fish slaughter practices.		
Incorporate best practices, including OIE Guidelines and Council of Europe Recommendations, into training and auditing programmes.	✓	✓

² COM(2018) 87 final: *Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and The Council on the possibility of introducing certain requirements regarding the protection of fish at the time of killing.*

³ 1099/2009 Slaughter Regulation.

Apply existing system of validation and labelling of animal stunning equipment to fish stunning equipment.	✓	✓
Horizontal recommendations.		
An EU Animal Welfare Reference Centre to be tasked with: 1. Consolidating knowledge base and identifying best practices. 2. Identifying and prioritising knowledge gaps. 3. Ensuring efficacy of commercially available stunning equipment. 4. Validating efficacy of best management practices.	✓	
Promote the need for species specific standards at international fora (in particular the World Organisation for Animal Health).	✓	✓



Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC)

Rue de l'Industrie 11, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0) 2 720 00 73

E-mail: secretariat@aac-europe.org

Twitter: @aac_europe

www.aac-europe.org