



Recommendation for the Setting Up of a Fish Welfare Reference Centre

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Policy background

DG Sante, in co-operation with Member States, has set up Animal Welfare Reference Centres in relation to:

- Welfare of pigs
- Welfare of poultry and other small farmed animals
- Welfare of ruminants and equines

Legislation setting out the rules for designating Animal Welfare Reference Centres are set out in article 95 of "Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products ...". Rules for determining their responsibilities and tasks are laid down in article 96.

The setting up of animal welfare reference centres is carried out by means of implementing acts, for example the Pig Reference Centre by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/329.

Each reference centre has a specific work programme and they can be given the following responsibilities:

- Helping national bodies to ensure good welfare in line with legislation, developing operational indicators as needed
- Developing welfare assessment and methods for improving welfare
- Carrying out research and collaborating with researchers
- Conducting training courses for staff of national bodies, competent authorities and for experts from third countries
- Disseminating research findings and technical innovations.

Most reference centres also have a reflection Board, constituted by farmers, related professional organizations and civil society organizations.

EU legislation on welfare during farming, transport and slaughter applies to farmed fish. The Transport Regulation (1/2005) also applies to the commercial transportation of ornamental fish. Welfare in capture fisheries and angling are currently not covered by this legislation.

Fish welfare background

Fish and other sentient aquatic animals are farmed or handled and traded commercially in aquaculture, capture fisheries, research, ornamental fish trade, and angling. There are a wide range of welfare issues. Welfare requirements vary according to species, farming system, area and habitat. Since practical solutions to these situations should be science based, the development of a reference centre involving experts from across Europe is the right means for achieving progress in this field. The scope of this recommendation applies to the welfare of farmed fish and other aquatic animals.

Since this is a huge area, priorities will need to be set.



Recommendations

The EU should set up a fish welfare reference centre based on a consortium of institutions with a range of expertise and field work capacity to ensure that all key species and aquaculture systems are covered, incorporating regional diversity.

The reference centre should have a wide remit to include at least the welfare of all farmed fish and other sentient farmed aquatic animals.

Priorities should include the development of species-specific guidelines, operational indicators, as well as prioritizing requirements for legislation and research, for farmed fishes at all stages including hatcheries, rearing, transport and slaughter. The reference centre should also consider the welfare of farmed fishes and other sentient aquatic animals that are farmed in third countries and are later imported into the EU.

The reference centre will also have a role in disseminating research findings and technical innovations as well as in conducting training courses for national scientific support networks, for the staff of Member State competent authorities and for experts from third countries.

The responsibilities and the activity programme of the Reference Centre should be planned and carried out in close consultation, collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders including representatives of industry, small and large, and NGOs.

Dissenting opinion: The EAA is against this proposal for “Fish Welfare Reference Centres”, which we find is not needed and an unnecessary use of tax-payers’ money.



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