



# AAC Recommendation on Priorities for EURCAWaquatic

AAC 2024-8

August 2024



The Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) gratefully acknowledges EU funding support





**Index**

Index ..... 2

Background..... 3

    EURCAWaquatics..... 3

    Reference Centre Responsibilities and Tasks ..... 3

EURCAWaquatic’s work..... 3

    Knowledge Transfer..... 3

    Supporting Good Policy ..... 4

    Priority Welfare Topics ..... 5

Stakeholder Engagement ..... 5

Recommendations to Member States and Commission..... 6

    Knowledge Transfer..... 6

    Supporting Good Policy ..... 6

    Priority Topics..... 6

    Stakeholder Engagement ..... 7



## Background

### EURCAWaquatics

In March 2022, the Aquaculture Advisory Council adopted a [recommendation](#) to the European Commission recommending that it establish an EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare for sentient, aquatic animals in aquaculture. The AAC welcomes the establishment in early 2024 of EURCAWaquatic, and that it reflects our recommendation that the centre be composed of institutions with a range of expertise and field work capacity.

### Reference Centre Responsibilities and Tasks

EU Reference Centres for Animal Welfare are derived from the Official Controls Regulation (EU) 2017/625. The responsibilities and tasks of a centre are defined there as:

- (a) providing scientific and technical expertise within the scope of their mission including, where appropriate in the form of coordinated assistance, to relevant national support networks and bodies in the area governed by rules referred to in point (f) of Article 1(2)<sup>1</sup>;*
- (b) providing scientific and technical expertise for the development and application of the animal welfare indicators referred to in point (e) of Article 21(8)<sup>2</sup>;*
- (c) developing or coordinating the development of methods for the assessment of the level of welfare of animals and of methods for the improvement of the welfare of animals;*
- (d) carrying out scientific and technical studies on the welfare of animals used for commercial or scientific purposes;*
- (e) conducting training courses for staff of the national scientific support networks or bodies referred to in point (a), for staff of the competent authorities and for experts from third countries; and*
- (f) disseminating research findings and technical innovations and collaborating with Union research bodies in the fields within the scope of their mission.*

## EURCAWaquatic's work

### Knowledge Transfer

At the core of EURCAWaquatic's mission is developing tools and advice that are scientifically based, and practical in real world scenarios and production systems. This is a much needed function at this time in the development of aquatic animal welfare scientific knowledge and best practices in aquaculture.

Much scientific animal welfare knowledge has been developed in recent years. Applying it in real world scenarios is challenging especially due to the diversity of aquaculture production systems, the diversity of locations and environments in which aquaculture takes place, and the challenges of

---

<sup>1</sup> *Welfare requirements for animals*

<sup>2</sup> *The cases and conditions where official controls to verify compliance with animal welfare requirements may include the use of specific animal welfare indicators based on measurable performance criteria, and the design of such indicators on the basis of scientific and technical evidence.*



disseminating science and practical experience. The diversity of scenarios in which aquaculture takes place places special demands on operators to innovate and adapt knowledge to their own context, and in turn operators gain high levels of technical knowledge. The learned knowledge of operators is an essential source of technical knowledge for EURCAWaquatics in its work, and EURCAWaquatics should support further knowledge transfer by facilitating communication among aquaculture operators and experts.

EURCAWaquatic should develop tools and advice using information obtained from the best science, the best practical experience, and the combined knowledge and experience of all stakeholders. The AAC looks forward to EURCAWaquatics contributing much needed capacity building among EU and national authorities, aquaculture farmers, and other stakeholders including NGOs.

Advice is needed to translate scientific knowledge into practical, better working practices. Consolidating knowledge into best practice guidelines will help farmers to follow regulations, to meet certification requirements, and to develop and implement their own best practices.

The challenges of implementing scientific knowledge in a diverse range of aquaculture systems make case studies of good practices in European aquaculture a particularly valuable format for advice. This aids in interpreting the science into real world contexts, and in disseminating learned knowledge of how to develop and manipulate equipment and standard operating procedures effectively.

There remain many knowledge gaps on aquatic animal welfare in aquaculture, and EURCAWaquatic should advise on the most impactful knowledge gaps as priorities for future research.

### **Supporting Good Policy**

Advice is needed on the interpretation of legislation by Member States. Variation in the interpretation of rules between Member States can lead to an unlevel playing field within the single market, and an unreasonable administrative burden on operators. Providing training and advice directly to Competent Authorities and creating a platform for national authorities to exchange views and best practices, can develop the common approach that is essential for good policy.

All of the advice and outputs from EURCAWaquatics are ultimately for use in aquaculture operations, and aquaculture operators should be a primary audience for all of EURCAWaquatic's work. Developing common tools for all stakeholders will allow for the best and even application of rules and best practices. EURCAWaquatic should provide advice on the interpretation of legislation to producers and other stakeholders, as well as competent authorities. EURCAWaquatic should take advice from the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism (AAM) on the most suitable format for outputs and the most effective dissemination routes for reaching aquaculture stakeholders. Additionally, the Aquaculture Advisory Council should be notified of all of EURCAWaquatic's outputs.

Legislation needs to be up to date and fit for purpose to be effective. EURCAWaquatic should review existing legislation and propose changes to make them up to date and fit for purpose. It should also assist the Commission in the review and updating of legislation and the development of new legislation.

EURCAWaquatic should promote higher aquatic animal welfare standards globally and contribute to a level playing field for European products vs. imports, by providing training to experts from third countries. This should especially be carried out through technical cooperation measures in EU Free Trade Agreements.



EURCAWaquatic should coordinate with other political mechanisms and agencies that carry out work on aquatic animal welfare to ensure each produces work that is aligned and complementary, and to avoid duplication. This will include the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism, and may include for example, EFSA, STECF, etc. There should be special coordination between EURCAWaquatic and AAM on delivery of the Strategic Aquaculture Guidelines, and connections with the SCARfish committee on research needs.

### **Priority Welfare Topics**

The AAC has articulated a comprehensive overview of important animal welfare topics in European aquaculture, in its recent recommendation on a Code of Good Practices for Welfare in European Aquaculture. The AAC considers that the priority topics for EURCAWaquatics to work on are:

- Stunning and Slaughter
- ∄ Emergency killing
- Transport
- Handling
- Behavioural needs of fish and environmental enrichment
- Stocking density
- Feeding and nutrition
- Feed withdrawal
- Alternative feed sources and supplements
- Welfare impact of climate change (incl. mass mortalities, impacts of acidification)
- ∄ Disease prevention
- Mitigating strategies to reduce welfare concerns due to predator attacks

A key priority is the development of a range of practical, on-farm welfare indicators in relation to all of the above. These should include indicators that are species-specific and life-stage specific covering the whole lifecycle.

EURCAWaquatics should focus on implementing knowledge relating to the most produced species. With regard to potential new species, EURCAWaquatics could advise on the potential to achieve a good life for the species in aquaculture.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Successfully connecting policy, science and commercial practice requires close engagement with stakeholders in the design, planning and dissemination of work. EURCAWaquatics should maintain close relationships with stakeholders including producers, NGOs, scientists, veterinarians, and officials. This should include a relationship with the Aquaculture Advisory Council and with a Reflection Board like the previous reference centres have. As far as possible stakeholders should be engaged collectively to foster common understanding. This is essential for EURCAWaquatic to be up



to date regarding the needs of aquaculture operators, the validity of technologies in commercial settings, as well as to ensure outputs and dissemination of activities are relevant.

## **Recommendations to Member States and Commission**

### **Knowledge Transfer**

- The main focus of work should be scientifically valid tools and advice that are practical to implement in real world scenarios.
- Consolidate knowledge into best practice guidelines.
- Develop case studies of real world implementation of current best practices.
- Use knowledge from scientific literature and from professional experts including producers, veterinarians, and NGOs.
- Make all outputs accessible to aquaculture operators.
- Provide training to aquaculture operators, veterinarians, and NGOs.
- Identify priority knowledge gaps for future research.
- Outputs should be produced in a range of accessible formats including a podcast, and distributed through a platform that allows for feedback from and knowledge sharing among stakeholders.
- Take guidance from the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism on the best formats for outputs and routes for dissemination to aquaculture stakeholders.
- Develop a joint programme of training and guidance with AAM

### **Supporting Good Policy**

- Support common interpretation and implementation of legislation by providing training and advice to national authorities, official veterinarians, and operate a platform for them to exchange views and best practices (N.B. consider hosting within the AAM's Member States area).
- Review legislation, propose changes to make them up to date, and assist the Commission in reviewing and developing legislation.
- Provide training to experts from third countries.
- Coordinate with other agencies and mechanisms including the Standing Committee of Agricultural Research (SCAR) Fish Committee, Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism and the European Food Safety Authority, and any other EU agency working on fish welfare.str

### **Priority Topics**

- Comprehensive, practical, on-farm welfare indicators are a major priority.
- Major aquaculture species should be the priority.



## *AAC Recommendation on Priorities for EURCAWaquatic*

- The AAC considers the following to be priority topics for EURCAWaquatics to work on:
  - Stunning and Slaughter
  - Emergency killing
  - Transport
  - Handling
  - Behavioural needs of fish and environmental enrichment
  - Stocking density
  - Feeding and nutrition
  - Feed withdrawal
  - Welfare impact of climate change (incl. mass mortalities, impacts of acidification)
  - Alternative feed sources and supplements
  - Disease prevention
  - Mitigating strategies to reduce welfare concerns due to predator attacks
- Species-specific and life-stage specific operational welfare indicators.
- All major production systems and technologies should be addressed

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Maintain ongoing and close relationships with all stakeholders including producers, NGOs, veterinarians, and scientists.



### **Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC)**

Rue Montoyer 31, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0) 2 720 00 73

E-mail: [secretariat@aac-europe.org](mailto:secretariat@aac-europe.org)

Twitter: @aac\_europe

[www.aac-europe.org](http://www.aac-europe.org)