



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.A.2

Subject: AAC Recommendation on laying the foundations for aquatic animal welfare in EU legislation

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I would like to thank you for your mail of 11th June 2026 including the “*Recommendation on laying the foundations for aquatic animal welfare in EU legislation*”. In this letter, I will respond to the recommendations made to the European Commission in this document by the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC).

As announced in the Livestock Strategy, and as well during our recent meeting with the AAC, the Commission intends to present a targeted revision of the legislation on the welfare of animals on farms, including with the objective to follow-up on the European Citizens’ Initiative “End the Cage Age”, with a sector-by-sector approach. The Commission intends to focus on key priority sector(s): laying hens, broilers and pigs. The aquaculture sector is not foreseen in this targeted revision at this stage.

Concerning farmed aquatic animals, the Commission is however focusing on improved implementation of the existing rules applicable to farmed aquatic animals as well as supporting research on best practices for fish welfare and animal welfare indicators across the main farmed species, production systems and life stages.

The EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare on aquatic animals (EURCAW-Aqua) will amongst others support EU Member States in carrying out official controls. It will furthermore increase scientific and technical knowledge on aquatic animal welfare needs. Work is also ongoing on the issue of welfare indicators for farmed fish, through the EURCAW-Aqua and the external ongoing study on animal welfare indicators on farm, during transport and at the time of killing.

In addition, the European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare (EUPAHW) was launched in 2024, supported by Horizon Europe. The EUPAHW is a major collaborative research initiative involving more than 90 entities throughout Europe. This partnership is pivotal in closing the knowledge gaps and advancing technologies and methods to improve the health and welfare of both terrestrial and aquatic animals. The emphasis on aquatic animals across numerous projects underscores the EUPAHW’s comprehensive

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and inclusive approach to animal welfare research and will help to improve practices regarding animal welfare based on the latest scientific and technical evidence. Several projects under this partnership are dedicated to indicators for aquatic animals. The EUPAHW is set to operate at least until 2030.

Considering the ongoing work as mentioned above, the Commission does not intend in the short term to send mandates to EFSA on the welfare of farmed fish. I have, however, been informed about the intentions of the European Parliament to send the mandates on the welfare of finfish to EFSA.

On the welfare of aquatic animals during transport, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council on the protection of animals during transport, to replace Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005. The objectives of this legislative proposal are amongst others to improve the welfare conditions of transported animals in line with the latest scientific evidence, and to facilitate the enforcement of the EU rules. The scope of this legislative proposal covers terrestrial and aquatic species transported for economic purposes within the Union and from the Union to third countries. Specific provisions for the transport of aquatic animals are proposed, as well as empowerments for the Commission to adopt tertiary legislation in the future aimed to update the technical rules on the transport of aquatic animals, considering technical progress and the latest scientific developments on species-specific welfare needs.

The co-legislators, the European Parliament and the Council, are working intensively on this file. The trilogues with the co-legislators on the legislative text will start once they have finished their preparatory work. I trust, the new legislation will improve animal welfare while ensuring the feasibility of the new rules. The proposal furthermore contains requirements for equivalent standards for imports into the EU of live animals from non-EU countries.

Let me also address the research-related AAC recommendations, notably:

- *Support and invest in further research and innovation to define appropriate best practices for fish welfare across the main farmed species, life stages and production systems.*

Animal welfare issues in aquaculture are high on the EU research and innovation agenda. Despite considerable efforts through the ongoing EUPAHW as well as with projects such as Cure4Aqua and IGNITION, welfare indicators are still not complete for all species and particularly for early life stages in different production systems. The next EU framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe 2028-34, is still under discussion, as part of the multiannual financial framework (MFF), and I hope that it will continue to support research and innovation on farmed fish welfare.

- *Use EU R&I funding to support welfare-oriented breeding programmes and shared health and welfare data systems, linking harmonised animal-based indicators to breeding objectives and prioritising traits that improve survival, resilience, and reduce treatment needs. Build on Code EFABAR for trait definitions, recording and reporting, and support wider uptake and refinement.*

Horizon Europe is already supporting welfare-oriented breeding research, e.g. through the projects EUaqua.org and SelectOrganic. The European forum of farm animal breeders (EFFAB) is a partner in both projects, and the Commission is aware of the Code EFABAR and the EFFAB priorities in aquaculture breeding and genetics. As already mentioned, Horizon Europe 2028-34 is still under discussion in the frames

of the next MFF and it is likely that it will continue supporting animal welfare-oriented breeding programmes, including on shared health and welfare data systems.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia RUBECK, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu ; +32.2.296.88.89), who will forward them to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

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