



Increased funding to validate on-farm aquatic animal welfare indicators

Purpose

The recommendation calls for increased and better-targeted funding to validate welfare indicators for farmed aquatic animals under real commercial conditions, with particular attention to confirming that fish are effectively stunned and remain insensible throughout slaughter. It calls for harmonised implementation of species-specific welfare indicators across the EU, guided by introduced EU-level legislation, with Member States invited to apply the resulting indicators through the systems they already operate.

Where the science stands

Operational welfare indicators for husbandry are now relatively advanced for several major farmed species, including salmonids, seabream and seabass ([Noble et al., 2026](#); [Mitropoulou et al., 2026](#)). For these domains the remaining challenge is harmonisation, validation and operational uptake rather than the development of new frameworks.

Validation of stunning effectiveness in commercial settings is considerably less developed. Reliable confirmation of insensibility currently depends on electroencephalogram (EEG) measures paired with visually evoked responses (VER), which require specialised laboratory equipment and expertise.

Why this matters for Member States

The Commission's 2025 overview report on the welfare of farmed fish in the EU identified uneven implementation across Member States, limited species-specific legislation and welfare controls, an absence of harmonised welfare indicators, limited expertise, and practical difficulties in inspecting remote aquaculture facilities ([European Commission, 2026](#)). Without validated, field-applicable indicators, competent authorities lack a consistent basis on which to inspect and verify stunning effectiveness, and producers face divergent expectations across the internal market. The EFSA scientific opinions announced in the [2021 Farm to Fork roadmap](#) have still not been mandated, which continues to delay a common evidence base.

Main takeaway

The scientific groundwork and the legislative framework sit with the Commission and EFSA; Member States are asked to co-finance the validation work and to apply the resulting indicators through inspection and licensing systems that already exist. Engaging at this stage, while the next MFF period and the successor funding arrangements are still being shaped, is what makes a harmonised approach possible and avoids the divergent national practices that would otherwise follow.

Recommendations

In this regard, we recommend to the European Commission:

- Increase targeted funding under EUPAHW, EMFAF and the future MFF for the consolidation, harmonisation, validation and implementation of species-specific welfare indicators, including systems accessible to SMEs.
- Issue the outstanding EFSA mandates on the welfare of the most commonly farmed aquatic species.
- Support the development and validation of field-based methods for assessing insensibility, and set out a science-based pathway towards future legislative requirements on effective stunning.
- Introduce EU-level legislation to protect farmed aquatic animals, grounded in validated indicators and proven best practice.
- Require manufacturer transparency on the validated performance of stunning equipment, and support the transition towards high-welfare systems, including equivalence for imported products.

In this regard, we recommend to the Member States:

- Co-finance field trials and validation studies using EU and national funding, in collaboration with EU programmes, industry (including SMEs), research organisations, NGOs and civil society, and provide direct funding to producer organisations and professional unions for welfare-related research and implementation tailored to the farming conditions of their members.
- Integrate validated welfare indicators and stunning effectiveness checks into national inspection, auditing and licensing systems, to support consistent enforcement and continuous improvement.
- Integrate manufacturer transparency requirements and validated welfare effectiveness criteria for stunning equipment into national slaughterhouse approval and licensing procedures, consistent with the approach applied to terrestrial species under Articles 14 and 16 of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009.

The full text of the policy recommendation is available [here](#).



Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC)

Rue Montoyer 31, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0) 2 720 00 73

E-mail: secretariat@aac-europe.org

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aquaculture-advisory-council/>

www.aac-europe.org