



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.A.2/BVT

Subject: AAC Recommendation on increased funding to validate on-farm aquatic animal welfare indicators, including stunning at slaughter

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I would like to thank you for your mail of 26 August 2026 including the “*AAC Recommendation on increased funding to validate on-farm aquatic animal welfare indicators, including stunning at slaughter*”.

I am pleased to respond to the recommendations addressed by the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) to the European Commission.

The AAC specifically recommends that the Commission:

- *Increase targeted funding under EUPAHW, EMFAF, and the future MFF for the consolidation, harmonisation, validation, and implementation of species-specific welfare indicators, alongside applied research on effective slaughter methods and stunning effectiveness under commercial conditions, including systems suitable for SMEs.*

Calls under the EU Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare (EUP AHW) are agreed by the funding bodies in consultation with the Commission and relevant stakeholders. Current activities include research on animal health and welfare in aquaculture, including the validation of animal health and welfare indicators for selected species.

Under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), Member States may support projects on species-specific fish welfare indicators, provided that such measures are included in their National Strategic Plans for Aquaculture and EMFAF programmes. As regards the relevant programmes under the future MFF, discussions are still ongoing. The priorities highlighted by the AAC will be taken into account when the relevant programmes and calls are developed.

Mr. Brian Thomsen
Chairman of the AAC
Email : brian@danskakvakultur.dk
Rue de la Science, 10
B – 1000 Brussels
Belgium

Commission européenne/Europese Commissie, 1049 Bruxelles/Brussel, BELGIQUE/BELGIË - Tel. +32 22991111
Office: J-99 05/014 - Tel. direct line +32 229-50483

charlina.vitcheva@ec.europa.eu

- *Issue planned EFSA mandates to assess the welfare of the most commonly farmed aquatic species; support the implementation of species-specific welfare indicators across the EU; and introduce EU legislation to protect farmed aquatic animals.*

As announced in the “EU Livestock Strategy” ⁽¹⁾, and as well during recent meetings 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” ⁽²⁾, with a sector-by-sector approach. At this stage, the Commission intends to focus on the following priority sectors: laying hens, broilers and pigs. Aquaculture is therefore not included in the scope of this targeted revision at this stage.

For farmed aquatic animals, the Commission is focusing on improving 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.

Several research projects on animal welfare indicators are currently ongoing under Horizon Europe, including through the **EU Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare**, alongside an **external study** commissioned by the Commission. The main objective of this study is to develop a coherent set of operational and harmonised animal welfare indicators, based, where feasible, on stakeholder consensus. The indicators could support the monitoring of animal welfare at farm, transport and slaughter, as well as policy development and evaluation and their use by operators. The study covers the four farmed finfish species with the highest production volumes in the EU: rainbow trout, common carp, European seabass and gilthead seabream. It also includes a review of available evidence and material from previous research projects and initiatives undertaken by competent authorities, industry and civil society organisations.

In addition, in the context of the implementation of the **Strategic Guidelines for EU Aquaculture**, the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism has developed the **Code of Good Practices on Fish Welfare and Fish Welfare Indicators** ⁽³⁾. The Code outlines general (non-species specific) best practices for fish welfare and indicators used in welfare assessment in the EU, applicable across different life stages and production methods. Moreover, the **European Reference Centre on the welfare of aquatic animals** is working on indicators for farmed aquatic species that can assist Member States in conducting official controls.

The Commission does not intend in the short term to send mandates to European Food Safety Authority on the welfare of farmed fish.

As regards the stunning and killing of fish, according to Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, fish shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations. The provisions in the Regulation on stunning and stunning methods and equipment do not apply to fish. Member States may however adopt stricter national rules aimed at ensuring more extensive protection of fish at the time of killing in accordance with article 26 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2026)576

⁽²⁾ [ECI ‘End the Cage Age’ - Food Safety - European Commission](#)

⁽³⁾ [Code of good practices on fish welfare and fish welfare indicators | EU Aquaculture](#)

- *Provide financial support for the transition towards high-welfare systems, including support for SMEs, and ensure trade frameworks reflect equivalent animal welfare standards for imported aquaculture products.*

Member States can make use of EMFAF to fund such projects on the condition that it has been included in their National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture and EMFAF Programmes.

EMFAF may support projects aimed at improving fish welfare, where included in the relevant national programmes. As regards imports, animal welfare considerations are addressed, where relevant, through the EU's trade policy and in accordance with the EU's international obligations. Recent EU trade agreements also include commitments to promote sustainable and responsible aquaculture, including in accordance with the FAO Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture.

The Commission will continue to follow developments in this area closely and values the AAC's contribution to the ongoing work on animal welfare in aquaculture.

Should you have further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia RUBECK, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Julia.rubeck@ec.europa.eu) and/or Ms Birgit VAN TONGELEN (birgit.van-tongelen@ec.europa.eu).

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: Cecile.Fouquet@aac-europe.org ; secretariat@aac-europe.org;