

Welfare of Fish: Own Initiative Adoption of the General Guidelines

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Video conference meeting,
15 June 2020

Why is this Own Initiative important?

- **Fish are sentient beings and can feel pain** (OIE, 2008, EFSA, 2009).
- **Fish are particularly sensitive to their environment and handling.**
- **EU regulations require that we pay full regard to their welfare.**

The guidelines created by this initiative will allow farmers, competent authorities and the public to best ensure fish welfare.

EU Farm – to – fork strategy (2020) mentions among other:

- **Farmed fish and seafood is a very important sector for environmentally sustainable food production.**
- **Better animal welfare is a high priority, including a major revision of regulations.**
- **EU aquaculture policy is placed in the context of improving animal welfare and regulations.**

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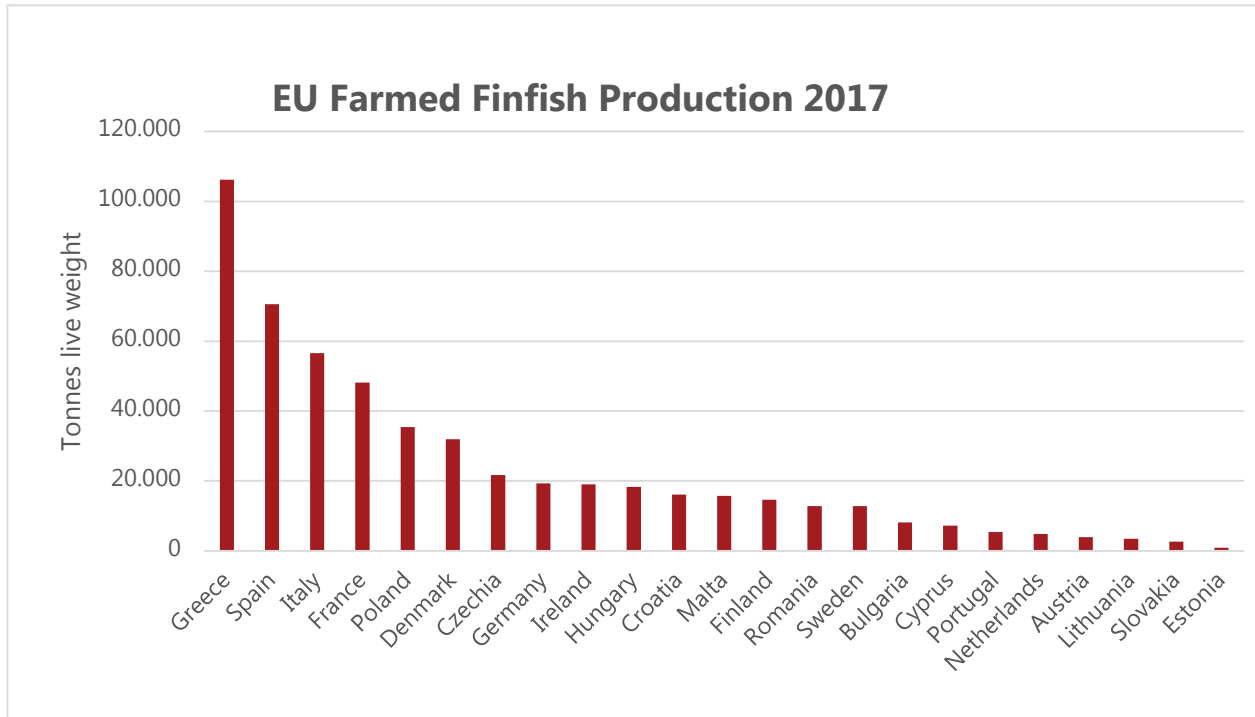
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Why this Own Initiative?

EU Farmed fish production 2017 – 535,329 tonnes



Source of data: Eurostat

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Members - update

PAW Member	Initiative Delegate
Greece	Katerina Marinou
Denmark	Birte Broberg
Germany	Stephan Reiser
Italy	Amedeo Manfrin
Spain	Pilar Leon/ Maria Teresa Villalba
Norway	Bente Bergersen, Kristine Marie Hestetun
Eurogroup for Animals	Douglas Waley
Compassion in World Farming	Natasha Boyland/ Krzysztof Wojtas
RSPCA	Malcolm Johnstone
Animals Angels	Helena Bauer
International Society for Applied Ethology (ISAE)	Dr Moira Harris
FVE	Kari Norheim/Alain Schonbrodt
FEAP	Bernhard Feneis
FEAP	Andrea Fabris, Niels Henriksen
EFFAB	Ana Granados Chapatte
Linda Keeling	Albin Gräns
Evangelia N. Sossidou	Evangelia Sossidou
OIE (observer status)	Djahne Montabord
DG MARE (observer status)	Birgit Van Tongelen
<u>Secretariat:</u>	
Eurogroup for Animals	Alessia Virone/ Sophie Aylmer

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Meetings

1) Brussels, 25 September 2018

3) Brussels, 9 April 2019

5) Brussels, 18 October 2019

2) Athens, 15 January 2019

4) The Hague, 21 June 2019

6) Video call, 5 May 2020

Acknowledgements

- Eurogroup for Animals
- Biomedical Research Foundation of the Academy of Athens
- Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, The Netherlands
- Federation of Greek Mariculture
- Compassion in World Farming

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General guidelines

The text of these guidelines on fish welfare is a combination of provisions and guidelines on handling of farmed fish from:

- ❑ the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning farmed fish, 2005
- ❑ new and updated provisions with knowledge and experience from initiative members



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Section No 1: Water Quality

General Guidelines Outline

Section I. Provisions from the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning farmed fish

Section II. Guides to good animal welfare practice

Each section covers:

A: General principles

B: Guidelines for the operator

C: Guidelines on specific water quality parameters and operating procedures

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Section No 1: Water Quality

A: General principles

- Poor water quality elicits a stress response in fish. Chronic stress in the long term can impair immune function, growth and reproductive function.
- The threats to fish welfare from physiological or pathological disturbances caused by water quality relate not only to its parameters' absolute levels but also to their rate of change. They also relate to the size of the fish, their developmental stage, previous experience, health status, and different coping strategies and capacities.



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Section No 1: Water Quality

B: Guidelines for the Operator

- All parties responsible for the keeping of fish should ensure that consideration is given to the potential impact of water quality on the welfare of the fish.
- Knowledge may be a result of formal training and practical experience.
- The water source and supply should be analyzed and ensured for aquaculture sites.



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Section No 1: Water Quality

C: Guidelines on specific water quality parameters and operating procedures

- Water quality should be monitored regularly and preferably with an automated system.
- The most important parameter for monitoring are: *Oxygen, ammonia, carbon dioxide, pH and temperature*
- The guidelines also address the keeping of eggs and young fish, handling of dead and moribund fish, transport containers, supersaturation, toxic metals, sulphur and suspended solids.



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Section No 2: Fish Handling General Guidelines Outline

**Section I. Provisions from the Council of Europe
Recommendation concerning farmed fish**

Section II. Guides to good animal welfare practice

Each section covers:

A: General principles

B: Guidelines for the operator

C: Guidelines on specific practices

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Section No 2: Fish Handling

A: General principles

- Handling causes stress and a brief period of stress may bring long lasting effects.
- Inappropriate handling procedures can lead to injury, pain, distress, and suffering.
- As a result, increased disease incidence, increased mortality, reduced appetite, impaired development, and deformities in fish may ensue.



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of Bernhard Feneis

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Section No 2: Fish Handling

B: Guidelines for the Operator

- All parties responsible for the keeping of fish should ensure that consideration is given to the potential impact of handling on the welfare of the fish.
- Knowledge may be a result of formal training and practical experience.
- Handling procedures should be gentle and kept to an absolute minimum.
- The operator should have relevant procedures that identify critical points in the handling procedure, propose corrective measures and indicate when to discontinue handling in order to maintain adequate fish welfare.

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Section No 2: Fish Handling

C: Guidelines on Specific Practices

- Preparatory activities include inspecting the condition of the fish, acclimatization and feed withdrawal.
- Crowding should avoid invoking a maximal stress response. The impact of crowding should be reduced primarily by carrying it out in several steps.
- Size grading prevents the development of aggressive behaviors and cannibalism and offers better access to feed. Instances of grading should be carefully planned and kept to a minimum.
- Equipment including pumps and nets should be designed to avoid physical injury and be maintained in good condition.

Fish should not be allowed to asphyxiate under any circumstances.

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Changes at Plenary

- Specify and emphasise in several places that advice can vary for different fish species, as well as life stage and history of individual fish.
- Point 3 Water Quality on natural variation in parameters is extended with detail on circumstances in which variation is naturally expected and when it can threaten welfare.

NEXT STEPS

- Species specific provisions including water quality parameters, handling practices, and behavioral indicators have been developed.
- More work is required before consensus is reached among all members.
- We ask the Platform to adopt the general guidelines today.



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Acknowledgements