



Global Conference on Animal Welfare: an OIE initiative

TOPIC: Areas of practical application

TITLE: Animal welfare issues relating to aquaculture, with special emphasis on conditions in Norway

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ABSTRACT:

Aquatic animals and aquatic animal products are among the principal sources of protein in the human diet. While traditional fisheries have levelled out, the aquaculture industry has over the last three decades developed to become the fastest growing food production in the world and it will continue to grow in the years to come. While all traditional domestic animals as well as companion animals have received considerable attention regarding animal welfare, the most recently “domesticated animal”, the farmed fish, has received little attention despite the fact that these animals also are covered by legislation in many countries.

The reasons for this may be several: Fish are relatively new farm animals for which not all needs and demands are fully elucidated. They are poikilothermic and thus do not invoke the sympathy and compassion awarded to fur- and feathered animals. The nervous system of the fish is more simple in its structure which has led to discussion whether fish do feel pain or not. Although lacking a neo-cortex, it has been demonstrated that fish possess a nociceptive system and thus may register painful situations.

The growing interest in welfare of farmed fish amongst the public, by public authorities and commercial interests has focussed upon welfare of fish in legislation and farming conditions.

Continuous development of intensive rearing systems will inevitably increase the challenge as regards ethically acceptable farming. With the great diversity in aquaculture species farmed world wide, insufficient biological knowledge as well as differences in national and regional opinion regarding acceptable handling of aquatic animals, it may be difficult to achieve ethically acceptable standards in the near future.

The paper discusses in detail different areas in aquaculture such as farming conditions, feeding, genetics, handling, transport, stunning and slaughter methods, etc. in which animal welfare and ethics are of importance. Special emphasis is given to methods of sedation and stunning of fish prior to slaughter. The advantages and disadvantages relating to welfare issues associated with such methods are discussed.