

“WELFISH”

A network on fish welfare in European aquaculture

There is increasing pressure on regulatory authorities to legislate on fish welfare. The finfish aquaculture industry has also expressed a need for scientific data on which to base welfare recommendations. Although much less is known about the welfare of fish than about that of commonly farmed groups, like birds and mammals, there is an accumulating body of research on this topic, developed by experts in the EU and elsewhere.

To make effective use of this scattered information there is a pressing need for a focused, objective synthesis of the relevant data, carried out not just by researchers, but also by fish farmers and other stakeholders.



COST, an intergovernmental framework for European Cooperation in Scientific and Technical research, recently approved **WELFISH**, a European network focussed upon fish welfare, which will run from 2006 to 2010.

The principal aim of this Action is to bring all relevant stakeholders together to provide such a synthesis to contribute to a more secure foundation for the **development of operational welfare indicators (OWIs) – measurements or assessments of welfare that can be made practically at aquaculture facilities – , in order to monitor and safeguard the welfare of farmed fish**. Such development can only be achieved when good welfare, and its absence, can be identified and measured, which in turn requires a better scientific understanding of the fundamental physiological and behavioural capacities of fish.

This action will extend the focus on fish welfare to all key cultured European species such as carp, sea bream and sea bass in addition to salmonids.

The Research Unit of DG Fish has funded several projects in the area of fish welfare, some of which are near completion, while

others are just commencing. It now becomes important to share and exchange findings, views and ideas between these projects, as well as with projects funded at the national level across Europe.

WELFISH will provide an appropriate platform for such an exchange. The Action will thus involve the gathering together of European researchers with complementary expertise in the field of fish welfare, including those not involved in fish welfare projects funded to date.

The Action will also provide a forum for interaction with stakeholders, so ensuring involvement and participation from interested parties with respect to the development of fish welfare knowledge and tools, as well as their implementation in European Aquaculture. Training and dissemination activities are also foreseen.

WELFISH is divided into **three working groups (WG) spanning from basic fish physiology/behaviour to farming management practises.**

The first WG on **biological processes and fish welfare** will collate fundamental and comparative knowledge on the importance of different factors,

Project acronym:

WELLFISH

Full title of Project:

Welfare of fish in European aquaculture

EU contract number:

COST 867

Web-site:

www.fishwelfare.com

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e.g. brain physiology, stress physiology, health, behaviour, growth and environmental conditions, which are a prerequisite for the development, understanding and validation of fish welfare indicators in situations relevant to experimental and production environments. The second WG will formulate **operational welfare indicators** and produce OWI-matrices including production experience, environmental factors and key management procedures. The **fish welfare and management** WG will synthesise the interests of the main stakeholder groups in fish welfare, namely research, regulatory authorities and industry, to **formulate recommendations, control systems and support tools for decision makers in government and industry.**

In order to achieve a common recognition of welfare for fish and its effective support it will be necessary to ensure that all the partners understand and feel ownership of the common goal at a European level. The ultimate aim of this COST Action is to significantly support such a process.

“WELLFISH WILL INVOLVE THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF EUROPEAN RESEARCHERS WITH COMPLEMENTARY EXPERTISE IN THE FIELD OF FISH WELFARE”

