## INTRODUCTION

The original Code of Conduct that was developed by the FEAP in 2000 contributed to the development by many National Aquaculture Associations to National Codes of Practice and was incorporated into the European Code of Sustainable and Responsible Fisheries Practices.

Following changes and developments in European aquaculture since that time, the FEAP has reviewed and developed the Code of Conduct to reflect the advancements made in the sector.

The primary goal of this Code of Conduct, prepared by the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers, is to promote the responsible development and management of a viable and sustainable European aquaculture sector to assure the highest standard of quality food production while respecting environmental considerations and consumers' demands.

Aquaculture is defined as 'the rearing or culture of aquatic organisms using techniques designed to increase the production of the organisms in question beyond the natural capacity of the environment, the organisms remaining the property of a natural or legal person throughout the rearing or culture stage, up to and including harvesting'.

Modern aquaculture is a knowledge-based activity, requiring a strong scientific foundation for its technical success.

As a Code of Conduct, this document serves to establish and recommend guiding principles for those in Europe who are producing fish species through aquaculture.

The Code does not seek to distinguish between the species nor the types or scale of fish farms that are encountered within the European aquaculture sector.

Its purpose is to establish a common base, through effective self-regulation, for sectoral responsibility within society and demonstrate the considerations of the production sector towards the fish it rears, the environment and the consumer.

The Code is not definitive but addresses those areas that the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers considers to be important and of prime concern. Additionally, the role of the Code is to motivate and assist the development of the principles of best practices.

# A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EUROPEAN AQUACULTURE

## 1. Sustainable and Responsible Aquaculture

Aquaculture is an important European food production activity and, as such, has to assume the responsibilities of its status.

Aquaculture provides nutritious food of high quality to the consumer and fish farmers should plan, manage and maintain their activities to the standards expected.

The FEAP has developed this Code of Conduct with specific reference to:

1. The provisions for responsible aquaculture development contained in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which was adopted by the 28th Session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (1995).
2. The Communication of the European Commission on 'A Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture' [COM(2002) 511]
3. The Holmenkollen Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (Oslo - 1997).
4. The Biodiversity Action Plan for Fisheries of the European Community [COM (2001) 0162 final]
5. The FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No. 5: Aquaculture Development (FAO Fisheries Department -1997).
6. Recommendations for Farmed Fish; European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (Council of Europe – 2005)
7. The ICES Code of Practice on the Introductions and Transfers of Marine Organisms (Copenhagen 2004).
8. Codes of Practice and Manual of Procedures for Consideration of Introductions and Transfers of Marine and Freshwater Organisms (EIFAC -1988).
9. Guides for the Sustainable Development of Mediterranean Aquaculture (IUCN-MAPA-FEAP)

It is assumed that European and national legislation provide a minimum standard for aquaculture. It is hoped that this Code can serve to refine existing Codes and be the basis for the development of new individual national Codes of Practice or Codes of Conduct in order to interpret and apply existing, as well as to develop, refine or improve standards, as required.

*The increasing development of specific indicators, relevant to the recognition of sustainability, has been an integral part of this revision; the web version provides links and explanations of the relevance of these to the Code of Conduct.*

## 2. Guiding Principles for farming fish

The Code of Conduct for European Aquaculture addresses the responsibility of the fish farmer to the consumer, the fish and the environment. It presumes that aquaculture is recognised as a recognised user of resources and that its practitioners assume their position of responsibility in society.

Individuals, co-operatives and companies that engage in aquaculture, singularly and collectively:

- Shall make the best efforts to produce products of the highest quality at all stages of the aquaculture process.
- Shall plan, operate and monitor aquaculture sites whose characteristics are compatible with long-term sustainable operation, with acceptable ecological effects and in a manner that avoids unacceptable interaction with the environment and that conserves water resources

  Shall consult and collaborate with regional, national and European authorities for the development and implementation of policies, practices and regulations. These policies should assist the achievement of environmental, economic and social sustainability of the aquaculture production sector.
- Shall implement improvements in technology and in management where such advances are economically possible and can assist the sustainability of the activity and improve the social and environmental compatibility of aquaculture.
- Shall recognise the international concerns for the maintenance of biodiversity.
- Shall consult and co-operate with other aquaculture producers and sectoral suppliers for the development and agreement of common standards and objectives.

## 3. Consumers

The fish farmers of Europe shall provide nutritious products of the highest quality, guaranteeing full transparency of operation.

Aquaculture is a controlled process that allows the farmer to harvest fish, which is of consistent good quality, with the following characteristics:

- A safe source of proteins and fish oils of high dietetic quality
- Nutritious
- Freshness
- Good taste
- Continuous availability
- Detailed traceability
- Diversity of choice

Fish farmers shall contribute actively towards the balanced and sustainable development of aquaculture. They shall make their best efforts to assure the transparent development of the activity, responding to the demands and to the benefit of the consumer.

Fish farmers will endeavour to ensure the balance between supply and demand, in the short and the long-term, so as to respond to consumer demand and deliver economic stability to European aquaculture.

## 4. Social and Economic Relationships

The products of fish farming make significant contributions to the quality of life of the European citizen, contributing to health with high quality, nutritious food that is affordable.

Aquaculture provides throughout Europe significant economic benefits in the regions where they are located, many of which are remote and relatively disadvantaged.

Fish farmers must be aware of their position in society and the social contribution required of their professional activities, assuring their integration in local community development and planning.

To assure these aspects, those who are active in fish farming

- Shall co-operate with those involved in research, technological development and training activities that seek to improve the social and environmental compatibility of aquaculture.
- Shall work together with other water users to assure equitable use of the resource and mutual understanding.
- Shall acknowledge their responsibility towards local society by providing a safe and stable workplace.
    - Fish farming operations must be based on technology and equipment that ensure the safety of the employees. This includes establishing routines for handling materials and chemicals to avoid health hazards to workers.
- Shall provide training appropriate to the responsibilities of each individual
- Shall encourage the principles of lifelong learning and support the recognition of skills and competence in the workforce.

## 5. Fish Husbandry

Any person who owns farmed fish, or has farmed fish under his or her control, and every person engaged in the overseeing of farmed fish shall, according to their responsibilities, ensure that every step is taken to safeguard the health and welfare of such fish.

### 5.1. Water

The water supply should be of sufficient quality and quantity to ensure the well being of the species being farmed.

The fish farmers of Europe:

- Shall respect the considerations for welfare that apply to the species being raised.
- Shall take such measures as are appropriate to prevent disease outbreaks and implement regulated containment procedures should a disease outbreak occur.
- Shall use therapeutic agents in accordance with the appropriate legislation and the principles of best practice.

The responsibilities concerning the optimisation of fish welfare include:

- Avoidance of unnecessary stress of the fish – all measures should be taken to ensure that the media and conditions in which the population is held are optimised to maintain the well being of the fish stocks.
- Implementation of all relevant measures to prevent diseases
- Regular inspections - the fish should be inspected frequently enough to ensure that significant behavioural and physical changes would be discovered and acted upon immediately.
- Avoidance of the introduction of diseases – fish brought into an aquaculture system must be of good health and, where appropriate, certified origin. Adequate precautionary measures should be taken to avoid inter-farm contamination through direct physical contact.
- Seeking proper diagnosis if disease presence is suspected.
    a. When required, only licensed or approved therapeutic agents should be used.
    b. The precautionary use of therapeutic agents, notably antibiotics, is not an acceptable practise.
- Avoidance of spreading of diseases – fish farmers have the responsibility to minimise the risk of the spread of diseases beyond their farms into the ecosystem where wild fish and other farms may be affected.
- Regardless of the reason for mortalities, any dead or dying fish require prompt removal from the growing area, in a way that does not affect the welfare and health of the remaining stock.

### 5.2. Food and Feeding

Correct feeding practises ensure the optimum use of resources to secure growth, good health, quality and the best welfare.

Fish farmers should employ feeds that are made using sustainable resources.

- No artificial growth promoting agents shall be employed.
- All fish should receive adequate quantities of feed, using the correct diet for the species farmed.
- Feeds should be properly formulated and labelled.

### 5.3. Handling and Transportation

For the avoidance of unnecessary stress and injury, the handling and transport of live fish should be kept to a minimum and should be done using the least stressful method.

- Fish must be sufficiently fasted before and not be fed during transport
- Relevant water quality parameters should be monitored during transport.
- The strictest control procedures should be applied to fish that are transferred between farms and freshwater catchments areas so as to reduce the potential transfer of disease to a minimum.

### 5.4. Predators

Aquaculture can be affected negatively by many predators.

- Whenever possible, predators should be excluded from the contained areas where farmed fish are held.
- Where this is not possible, lethal methods of predator control shall only be used when this action is legally permissible for the predator species in question.

### 5.5. Stocking Rates

The stocking rates for fish should be adjusted to the specific requirements of the species and include respect for

- The fish population's health and behavioural needs for its well-being,
- The fish population's demands on the growing environment, in particular their behavioural needs, and a water exchange rate through the rearing facility so as to provide the requisite water quality.

### 5.6. Slaughter

- All fish should be fasted sufficiently before slaughter so as to induce a completely empty digestive system, securing the well-being of the fish and the post-harvest product quality.
- Recommended withdrawal periods for therapeutic agents must be carefully observed and implemented prior to harvesting.
- Fish should be killed quickly and efficiently, using approved methods.

### 5.7. Emergency slaughter

If fish are ill or injured to the extent that treatment is no longer feasible and transport would cause additional suffering, they must be killed on the spot, without delay, by trained and experienced personnel.

### 5.8. Genetically modified organisms

The FEAP does not endorse the use of genetically modified fish in aquaculture since it is concerned about the maintenance of the natural characteristics of the products, in addition to the environmental qualities of biodiversity. However, the results of genetic research may play an important part in the future development of global food production.

The FEAP may review its position on this topic if such developments are acceptable to the consumer and do not pose any food safety, quality, welfare or environmental problems.

### 5.9. Monitoring and Record-keeping

The aquaculture profession supports the principle of good self-governance and fish farms should aim to be self-regulating. To achieve this, proper systems of monitoring and recording are required.

Accurate records and their analysis are essential for the farmers to ensure good husbandry and welfare of the fish.

Effective self-regulation can be achieved through the routine monitoring of the resources that affect the farm, its production and its influence on the environment.

These include:

- Water quality (on and off-farm),
- The quality of other inputs, feeds and resources used in the production process,
- The traceability of the use of therapeutic agents,
- Off-farm environmental parameters that are of immediate and direct relevance to the production process,
- Meeting environmental standards and objectives,
- Meeting product quality and safety standards.

## 6. Environment

Fish farmers shall make every reasonable effort to maintain biological diversity.

The practise of aquaculture requires water and other raw materials and therefore the profession accepts that the activity has an impact and is committed to limit it.

All fish farms should be designed, developed and managed with a view to the equitable and efficient use of resources.

Fish farmers should apply the best available technology and procedures in order to optimise the farm husbandry and to minimise the impact of the interactions of the farm with the environment.

All workers should be aware of the issues concerning such interactions.

### 6.1. Site selection

Fish farmers shall use only those sites that are compatible with

- Long-term sustainable operations,
- Acceptable ecological effects.

Best efforts should be made for aquaculture to integrate harmoniously with the surroundings of the site.

### 6.2. Site Management

In performing everyday management activities, fish farmers shall:

- ensure that the potential for contamination of the environment will be minimised when using disinfecting agents and other therapeutic agents.
- dispose of waste and chemicals in a manner that does not constitute a hazard to human health and the environment and in accordance with the appropriate legislation.
- dispose of dead fish carefully and effectively, in an environmentally friendly manner.
- make best efforts so that the general appearance of the site is attractive, neat and tidy.

### 6.3. Planning for Emergencies

Farmers should take all steps necessary to have established procedures to inform authorities of events that require emergency action and the actions that have been taken.

### 6.4. Escapes

Farmers will seek to minimise the potential risks that are presented by farmed fish escapes to wild fisheries.

- Farmers will, in the event of escapes, take immediate action, co-operate and inform the respective authorities to assure that the appropriate actions are taken.