Fact sheets

Aquatic animals

About 50 per cent of global production of aquatic animals for human consumption comes from aquaculture, close to 90 per cent of which is produced by countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This production will only continue to grow in order to provide essential animal protein for the world’s increasing human population. The health of aquatic animals must be given equal attention to that of terrestrial animals, overcoming sanitary challenges met by the thousands of species concerned as well as the problems posed by the open environment in which these populations often live.

IMPROVING AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH WORLDWIDE

With the increase in farming of new aquatic animal species, new and emerging and re-emerging diseases are constantly being discovered. The OIE provides information on the aquatic animal disease situation worldwide — including disease alerts — through the online WAHIS system. The OIE also provides standards and guidelines for the improvement of aquatic animal health and welfare worldwide, including standards for safe international trade in these animals and derived products.

AQUATIC ANIMALS AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

THE OIE AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH CODE

Since 1995 the OIE Aquatic Code provides international standards for the surveillance, prevention and control of these diseases as well as the safe trade of amphibians, crustaceans, fish, molluscs and their products.

The development of these standards and recommendations is the result of the continuous work of the OIE’s Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission. The Commission comprises six experienced members elected by the World Assembly of Member Countries’ Delegates in the fields of surveillance, diagnosis, control and prevention of infectious aquatic animal diseases. It also draws upon the expertise of internationally renowned specialists on an ad hoc basis.

In May of each year, several new and revised chapters are approved for inclusion in the Aquatic Code, which is published annually. All are ratified by the OIE World Assembly of Delegates, which is made up of 178 Member Countries.

Welfare of aquatic animals

The use of aquatic animals by humans for food or any other purpose carries the ethical responsibility to avoid unnecessary suffering of these animals. The OIE has developed welfare standards in the Aquatic Animal Health Code for transport, stunning and killing for human consumption and killing for disease control purposes for farmed fish.

Use of antimicrobial agents

The use of antimicrobial agents in aquaculture and its potential to contribute to antimicrobial resistance raises important issues relating to public health and food safety, animal health and production, and health of the environment.

The OIE has developed standards in the Aquatic Animal Health Code on the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobial agents in aquatic animals and has also published a list of Antimicrobials of Veterinary Importance. These have been adopted by all OIE Member Countries.

THE OIE MANUAL OF DIAGNOSTIC TESTS FOR AQUATIC ANIMALS

The Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals provides a uniform approach to the diagnosis of the diseases listed in the OIE Aquatic Code and some other important diseases. The Aquatic Manual describes the diagnostic methods that can be applied in aquatic animal health laboratories all over the world. The Aquatic Manual is continually revised and updated as new information becomes available. A new edition is published every 4 years. The seventh edition of the Aquatic Manual will be published in 2014. Updates adopted between printed editions are made available on the online version.

Aquaculture versus fisheries

Two distinct industries are responsible for the production of amphibians, crustaceans, fish and molluscs: aquaculture (the farming of aquatic animals) and commercial fisheries (the capture of aquatic animals). With stocks of wild aquatic animals in decline worldwide, aquaculture is increasingly the source of aquatic animals feeding the world’s increasing human population and can contribute to the preservation of wild aquatic animals.
OIE TOOL FOR THE EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE OF VETERINARY SERVICES AND/OR AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH SERVICES

“OIE PVS TOOL: AQUATIC”

Strengthening Veterinary Services or Aquatic Animal Health Services (AAHS) to help them comply with OIE international standards for quality and evaluation requires active participation and investment by both the public and the private sector. The OIE has published the first edition (2013) of the PVS Tool: Aquatic which was designed to assist an AAHS to establish their current level of performance, to identify gaps and weaknesses in their ability to comply with OIE international standards, to form a shared vision with stakeholders (including the private sector) and to establish priorities and carry out strategic initiatives.

Available at:
www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Support_to_OIE_Members/docs/pdf/A_Aquatic_PVS_Tool_Final.pdf

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The OIE has established relationships with relevant organisations, for example the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) by entering into official agreements with these organisations.

The OIE is recognised by the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) as the international standard setting organisation for terrestrial and aquatic animal diseases, including those transmissible to humans.

OIE GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON AQUATIC HEALTH PROGRAMMES

Their benefits for global food security (Panamá, 28-30 June 2011)

The Conference demonstrated the importance of such programmes, as well as OIE standards and guidelines to securing global food security.

It served as a forum to give practical guidance on how countries, in particular developing countries, can mobilise governments and donors with the goal of improving aquatic animal disease control programmes through strengthening Veterinary Services and/or other competent authorities to meet the OIE standards for good governance, disease prevention and control and appropriate production practices.

www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Conferences_Events/docs/pdf/recommendations/A_Declaration.pdf
www.oie.int/eng/A_aquatic/en_presentations.htm

Spotlight on amphibians

The scale of the international trade in amphibians (e.g. frogs) is considerable: animals are exported for human consumption, as pets, for laboratory experiments and for bio-control purposes. Amphibians are susceptible to infectious diseases caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi and protozoa. Two types of disease are of particular international importance – the fungal disease chytridiomycosis (Infection with Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis) and disease caused by infection with ranavirus. Both are associated with the worrisome decline of amphibian populations that is occurring globally.

In 2008, the OIE World Assembly of Delegates decided that these two amphibian diseases should be listed, thereby requiring Members to notify outbreaks to the OIE. Standards regarding these two diseases are included to the OIE Aquatic Code and the Aquatic Manual.

For more information

OIE Aquatic Code:
www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/aquatic-code/access-online/

OIE Aquatic Manual:
www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/aquatic-manual/access-online/

OIE Aquatic Animals Health Standards Commission:
www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/specialists-commissions-groups/aquatic-animal-commission-reports/