Current OIE Standards in Surveillance: 
ten years since adoption

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When the current OIE standards on aquatic animal health surveillance were adopted ten years ago, they represented a significant innovation in the OIE approach to standard setting and established a new model for national and regional standards. Some of the key features of the standards included:

- A move from input-based to output-based standards, in which the details of surveillance activities undertaken may be decided by the member country, as long as the quality of the result (in terms of strength of evidence or precision of estimates) meets the required standard;

- A recognition of the potential value of surveillance activities that are not based on structured randomised surveys including in particular risk-based approaches and passive surveillance;

- Recognising the effect of the accumulation of evidence over time, paving the way for quantitative assessment of mandatory waiting periods;

- A comprehensive consideration of the factors and issues to be taken into account when designing surveillance.

As a result of these changes, OIE Member Countries have been faced with both opportunities and challenges. Previous input-based standards assumed that a single survey design would generate equivalent outputs in any context, despite major differences in risk, population and capacity. The new standards enabled all countries to design flexible cost-effective surveillance using locally-appropriate techniques while still meeting international requirements. On the other hand, greater expertise was required to design and interpret the results of surveillance, rather than simply following a prescriptive document, expertise which may not be widely available, especially in developing countries.

The full implications and benefits of this approach are yet to be realised: the disease chapters of the Aquatic Animal Health Code rarely define appropriate disease specific standards, and skills in the design of surveillance are often still inadequate.