Conducting risk assessment as a preliminary step to the establishment of a compartment in aquaculture

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The use of compartmentalisation is becoming more common for aquaculture species. This is being driven by the urgent need of industry for domesticated aquaculture stocks with a guaranteed health status and a genetically improved performance in terms of husbandry or disease resistance.

Prior to establishing a compartment, a comprehensive risk evaluation of all inputs and procedures should be performed. Risk prevention and mitigation should be implemented before the compartment is certified. Designing a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Print (HACCP)-like operational flow diagram is recommended, in order to monitor efficiently all identified risks and immediately design operational prerequisite programs for troubleshooting.

Taking into consideration the role of the Competent Authority in the certification of a compartment, it is necessary to establish a formal relationship with the private sector, based on transparency and full traceability.

Compartments are a necessary tool for the safe and sustainable development of aquaculture industries, as recent disease epidemics in crustaceans, fish and molluscs have amply demonstrated. However, the actors also have a high level of responsibility for transparency in the management of compartments; in the situation of unnoticed or unreported failure, the export of aquatic animals from a compartment can result in the dissemination of diseases regionally or internationally. In this respect, emerging diseases are an important issue. It is necessary to maintain complete traceability and a database of clients receiving the products from the compartment. These records should be accessible to the Competent Authority to facilitate rapid tracing and epidemiological studies in the situation where aquatic animals from a compartment are suspected to be the source of a disease outbreak.