

CHAPTER 4.1.

ZONING AND COMPARTMENTALISATION

Article 4.1.1.

Introduction

Given the difficulty of establishing and maintaining freedom from a particular *disease* for an entire country especially for *diseases* whose entry is difficult to control, there may be benefits to one or more Members in establishing and maintaining a *subpopulation* with a distinct aquatic animal health status. *Subpopulations* may be separated by natural or artificial geographical barriers or, in certain situations, by the application of appropriate management practices.

Zoning and compartmentalisation are procedures implemented by a country under the provisions of this chapter to define *subpopulations* of distinct aquatic animal health status for the purpose of *disease* control or *international trade*. Compartmentalisation applies to a *subpopulation* when management practices related to biosecurity are the defining factors, while zoning applies when a *subpopulation* is defined on a geographical basis. In practice, spatial considerations and good management play important roles in the application of both concepts.

This chapter is to assist OIE Members wishing to establish and maintain different *subpopulations*, using the principles of compartmentalisation and zoning. These principles should be applied in accordance with the measures recommended in the relevant *disease* chapter(s). This chapter also outlines a process through which trading partners may recognise such *subpopulations*. This process is best implemented by trading partners through establishing parameters and gaining agreement on the necessary measures prior to *outbreaks* of *disease*.

Before trade in *aquatic animals* or *aquatic animal products* may occur, an *importing country* needs to be satisfied that its *aquatic animal health status* will be appropriately protected. In most cases, the import regulations developed will rely in part on judgements made about the effectiveness of sanitary procedures undertaken by the *exporting country*, both at its borders and within its *territory*.

In addition to contributing to the safety of *international trade*, zoning and compartmentalisation may assist *disease* control or eradication within Members. Zoning may encourage the more efficient use of resources, and compartmentalisation may allow the functional separation of a *subpopulation* from other domestic or wild *aquatic animals* through biosecurity measures, which a *zone* (through geographical separation) would not achieve. Following an *outbreak* of *disease*, compartmentalisation may allow a Member be able to take advantage of epidemiological links among *subpopulations* or common practices relating to biosecurity, despite diverse geographical locations, to facilitate *disease* control and/or the resumption of trade.

Zoning and compartmentalisation may not be applicable to all *diseases*, but separate requirements will be developed for each *disease* for which the application of zoning or compartmentalisation is considered appropriate.

To regain the status of a *free zone* or *free compartment* following an *outbreak* of *disease*, Members should follow the recommendations in the relevant *disease* chapter in the *Aquatic Code*.

Article 4.1.2.

General considerations

The *Competent Authority* of an *exporting country* that is establishing a *zone* or *compartment* for *international trade* purposes should clearly define the *subpopulation* in accordance with the recommendations in the relevant chapters in the *Aquatic Code*, including those on *surveillance*, and the identification and traceability of *aquatic animals*. The *Competent Authority* of an *exporting country* should be able to explain to the *Competent Authority* of an *importing country* the basis for its claim of a distinct *aquatic animal health status* for the *zone* or *compartment* in such terms.

The procedures used to establish and maintain the distinct *aquatic animal health status* of a *zone* or *compartment* should be appropriate to the particular circumstances and will depend on the epidemiology of the *disease*, environmental factors, *risk* of introduction and establishment of *disease*, and applicable biosecurity measures. The *exporting country* should be able to demonstrate, through detailed documentation supplied to the *importing country*, published through official channels, that it has implemented the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code* for establishing and maintaining such a *zone* or *compartment*.

An *importing country* should recognise the existence of this *zone* or *compartment* when the appropriate measures recommended in the *Aquatic Code* are applied, and the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country* certifies that this is the case. Note that an *importing country* may adopt a higher level of protection where it is scientifically justified and the obligations referred to in Article 2.1.2. are met. Article 4.1.4. is also relevant.

Where countries share a *zone* or *compartment*, the *Competent Authority* of each country should collaborate to define and fulfil their respective responsibilities.

The *exporting country* should conduct an assessment of the resources needed and available to establish and maintain a *zone* or *compartment* for *international trade* purposes. These include the human and financial resources and the technical capability of the *Competent Authority* (and of the relevant industry, in the case of a *compartment*) including on *disease surveillance* and *diagnosis*.

Article 4.1.3.

Principles for defining a zone or compartment

In conjunction with the above considerations and the definitions of *zone* and *compartment*, the following principles should apply when Members define a *zone* or *compartment*:

1. The extent of a *zone* should be established by the *Competent Authority* on the basis of the definition of *zone* and made public through official channels.
2. The factors defining a *compartment* should be established by the *Competent Authority* on the basis of relevant criteria such as management and husbandry practices related to biosecurity, and made public through official channels.
3. *Aquatic animals* belonging to such *subpopulations* need to be recognizable as such through a clear epidemiological separation from other *aquatic animals* and all things presenting a *disease risk*.
4. For a *zone* or *compartment*, the *Competent Authority* should document in detail the measures taken to ensure the identification of the *subpopulation*, for example by means of registration of all the *aquaculture establishments* located in such a *zone* or *compartment* and the establishment and maintenance of its *aquatic animal health status* through a *biosecurity plan*. The measures used to establish and maintain the distinct *aquatic animal health status* of a *zone* or *compartment* should

be appropriate to the particular circumstances and will depend on the epidemiology of the *disease*, environmental factors, the *aquatic animal health status* in adjacent areas, applicable biosecurity measures (including movement controls, use of natural and artificial boundaries, the spatial separation of *aquatic animals*, and commercial management and husbandry practices), and *surveillance*.

5. For a *compartment*, the *biosecurity plan* should describe the partnership between the relevant enterprise/industry and the *Competent Authority*, and their respective responsibilities, including the procedures for oversight of the operation of the *compartment* by the *Competent Authority*.
6. For a *compartment*, the *biosecurity plan* should also describe the routine operating procedures to provide clear evidence that the *surveillance* conducted and the management practices are adequate to meet the definition of the *compartment*. In addition to information on *aquatic animal* movements, the *biosecurity plan* should include production and stock records, *feed* sources, traceability, *surveillance* results, visitor logbook, morbidity and mortality history, medications, vaccinations, documentation of training and any other criteria necessary for evaluation of *risk* mitigation. The information required may vary according to the *aquatic animal* species and *disease(s)* under consideration. The *biosecurity plan* should also describe how the measures will be audited to ensure that the *risks* are regularly re-assessed and the measures adjusted accordingly.
7. Thus defined, the *zones* and *compartments* constitute the relevant *subpopulations* for the application of the recommendations in Section 8. to Section 11. of the *Aquatic Code*.

Article 4.1.4.

Sequence of steps to be taken in establishing a zone or a compartment and having it recognised for international trade purposes

There is no single sequence of steps which should be followed in establishing a *zone* or a *compartment*. The steps that the *Competent Authority* of the *importing country* and the *exporting country* choose and implement will generally depend on the circumstances existing within the countries and at their borders, and their trading history. The recommended steps are:

1. For zoning
 - a) The *exporting country* identifies a geographical area, which it considers to contain an *aquatic animal subpopulation* with a distinct aquatic animal health status with respect to a specific *disease/specific diseases*, based on *surveillance*.
 - b) The *exporting country* describes in the *biosecurity plan* for the *zone* the measures which are being, or will be, applied to distinguish such an area epidemiologically from other parts of its *territory*, in accordance with the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code*.
 - c) The *exporting country* provides the above information to the *importing country*, with an explanation of why the area can be treated as an epidemiologically separated *zone* for *international trade* purposes.
 - d) The *importing country* determines whether it accepts such an area as a *zone* for the importation of *aquatic animals* and *aquatic animal products*, taking into account:
 - i) an evaluation of the *exporting country's Competent Authority*;
 - ii) the result of a *risk assessment* based on the information provided by the *exporting country* and its own research;
 - iii) its own *aquatic animal* health situation with respect to the *disease(s)* concerned; and
 - iv) other relevant OIE standards.

- e) The *importing country* notifies the *exporting country* of the result of its determination and the underlying reasons, within a reasonable period of time, being either:
 - i) recognition of the *zone*;
 - ii) request for further information; or
 - iii) rejection of the area as a *zone* for *international trade* purposes.
- f) An attempt should be made to resolve any differences over the recognition of the *zone*, either in the interim or finally, by using an agreed mechanism to reach consensus (such as the OIE dispute settlement mechanism).
- g) The *importing country* and the *exporting country* should enter into a formal agreement recognising the *zone*.

2. For compartmentalisation

- a) Based on discussions with the relevant enterprise/industry, the *exporting country* identifies a *compartment* of one or more *aquaculture establishments* or other premises that operate under common management practices related to biosecurity, and which contains an identifiable *aquatic animal subpopulation* with a distinct aquatic animal health status with respect to a specific *disease/specific diseases*; the *exporting country* describes how this status is maintained through a partnership between the relevant enterprise/industry and the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country*.
- b) The *exporting country* examines the *compartment's biosecurity plan* and confirms through an audit that:
 - i) the *compartment* is epidemiologically closed throughout its routine operating procedures as a result of effective implementation of its *biosecurity plan*; and
 - ii) the *surveillance* programme in place is appropriate to verify the status of such *aquaculture establishment(s)* with respect to such *disease(s)*.
- c) The *exporting country* describes the *compartment*, in accordance with the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code*.
- d) The *exporting country* provides the above information to the *importing country*, with an explanation of why such an enterprise can be treated as an epidemiologically separated *compartment* for *international trade* purposes.
- e) The *importing country* determines whether it accepts such an enterprise as a *compartment* for the importation of *aquatic animals* and *aquatic animal products*, taking into account:
 - i) an evaluation of the *exporting country's Competent Authority*;
 - ii) the result of a *risk assessment* based on the information provided by the *exporting country* and its own research;
 - iii) its own *aquatic animal* health situation with respect to the *disease(s)* concerned; and
 - iv) other relevant OIE standards.
- f) The *importing country* notifies the *exporting country* of the result of its examination and the underlying reasons, within a reasonable period of time, being either:
 - i) recognition of the *compartment*;
 - ii) request for further information; or
 - iii) rejection of such an enterprise as a *compartment* for *international trade* purposes.

- g) An attempt should be made to resolve any differences over the recognition of the *compartment*, either in the interim or finally, by using an agreed mechanism to reach consensus (such as the OIE dispute settlement mechanism).
 - h) The *importing country* and the *exporting country* should enter into a formal agreement recognising the *compartment*.
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