

A. Introduction

1. *The purpose of this guide is to assist the Veterinary Authority and/or other Competent Authorities of OIE Members to use the Aquatic Animal Health Code (hereafter referred to as the 'Aquatic Code') in developing their animal health measures applicable to imports and exports of aquatic animals and aquatic animal products.*
2. *The recommendations in each of the chapters in Sections 8 to 11 of the Aquatic Code are designed to prevent the disease in question being introduced into the importing country, taking into account the nature of the commodity and the aquatic animal health status of the exporting country. This means that, correctly applied, the recommendations ensure that the intended importation can take place with an optimal level of animal health security, incorporating the latest scientific findings and available techniques.*
3. *The recommendations in the Aquatic Code make reference only to the animal health situation in the exporting country, and assume that the disease is either not present in the importing country or is the subject of a control or eradication programme. Therefore, when determining its import measures, an importing country should do so in a way that is consistent with the principle of national treatment and the other provisions of the WTO SPS Agreement. An importing country is always free to authorise the importation of animals or animal products into its territory under conditions either more or less stringent than those recommended by the Aquatic Code, but this must be based on a scientific risk analysis and done in accordance with the country's obligations under the SPS Agreement.*
4. *To avoid confusion, key terms and expressions used in the Aquatic Code are defined in the Glossary. When preparing model international aquatic animal health certificates, the importing country should endeavour to use these terms and expressions in accordance with the definitions given in the Aquatic Code.*
5. *At the head of each chapter relating to a specific disease (in Sections 8 to 11 of the Aquatic Code), there is an article clearly describing the scope of each chapter.*
6. *In many of the Aquatic Code chapters, the use of diagnostic tests is recommended. In each case, a reference in the first article of the chapter is made to the relevant section in the OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals (hereafter referred to as the 'Aquatic Manual').*
7. *Chapters 5.1. and 5.2. of the Aquatic Code deal with general obligations related to certification and certification procedures. Veterinary Authorities and/or other Competent Authorities should have a sufficient number of copies of the Aquatic Code to allow all veterinarians directly involved in such trade to familiarise themselves with the contents. In addition, diagnostic laboratories should be fully conversant with the technical recommendations in the Aquatic Manual.*
8. *When, in some parts of this Aquatic Code, the term 'under study' is applied to an Article or part of an Article, the meaning is that the text has not been adopted by the OIE International Committee and is not part of the Aquatic Code. Accordingly, that recommendation needs not be applied by Members.*

9. *The complete text of the Aquatic Code has been made available on the OIE Web site (address: <http://www.oie.int>) to ensure wider access.*

B. Disease Information, the Bulletin and World Animal Health

These three OIE publications inform Veterinary Authorities and/or other Competent Authorities on the animal health situation world-wide. Importing countries can thus have an overview of the animal health status, disease occurrence and control programmes in exporting countries. If it considers the data available at the international level to be insufficient, the importing country should contact the exporting country directly, or through OIE Headquarters, to obtain additional information.

C. International Health Certificates

1. *An international aquatic animal health certificate is a document, drawn up by the exporting country in accordance with the terms of Chapter 5.1. and Chapter 5.2. of the Aquatic Code, describing the aquatic animal health requirements for the exported commodity. The assurance given to the importing country that diseases will not be introduced through the importation of aquatic animals or aquatic animal products depends on the quality of the exporting country's aquatic animal health infrastructure and the rigour with which international aquatic animal health certificates are issued in the exporting country.*
2. *International veterinary certificates are intended to facilitate safe trade and should not be used to impede it by imposing unjustified health conditions. In all cases, the exporting country and the importing country should refer to the health conditions recommended in the Aquatic Code before agreeing on the terms of the certificate. They should also respect their rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement.*
3. *The steps to be followed when drafting international aquatic animal health certificates are as follows:*
 - a) *list the diseases against which the importing country is justified in seeking protection;*
 - b) *list the health requirements for each of these diseases, which can be determined by referring to the relevant articles in the Aquatic Code; the Aquatic Code provides for various levels of sanitary status in the case of many diseases: disease free country, zone, compartment or aquaculture establishment;*
 - c) *use the model international aquatic animal health certificates presented in Chapter 5.10. of the Aquatic Code as a general framework, adapting the contents and form of the paragraphs as required, for example by devoting more space to details of the origin of the consignment.*
4. *As stated in Article 5.2.3. of the Aquatic Code, it is important that international aquatic animal health certificates be kept as simple as possible and be clearly worded, so as to avoid any misunderstanding of the requirements of importing countries. The same article gives advice on how to draft certificates so as to ensure the validity of their contents and prevent forgery.*

D. Notes of Guidance for Importers and Exporters

In order to avoid any misunderstanding of the requirements, it is often advisable to prepare notes of guidance to assist importers and exporters. The notes should set out all the conditions concerning importation measures to be applied before and after importation, as well as during transport and unloading, legal obligations and operational procedures. The attention of exporters

should also be drawn to the relevant International Air Transport Association (IATA) rules for the carriage of aquatic animals and aquatic animal products by air.

The notes of guidance should also set out in detail the health certification requirements to be included in the documents accompanying the consignment to its destination.