

FOREWORD

The aim of the Aquatic Animal Health Code (hereafter referred to as the 'Aquatic Code') is to assure the sanitary safety of international trade in aquatic animals (amphibians, crustaceans, fish and molluscs) and their products. This is achieved through the detailing of health measures to be used by Competent Authorities of importing and exporting countries to avoid the transfer of agents pathogenic for animals or humans, while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers.

The health measures in the Aquatic Code (in the form of standards and recommendations) have been formally adopted by the World Assembly of OIE Delegates which constitutes the organisation's highest decision-making body. This 12th edition incorporates the modifications to the Aquatic Code agreed by the World Assembly during the 77th General Session in May 2009. These include revised chapters on the following subjects: definitions, diseases listed by the OIE, general obligations related to certification, certification procedures, quality of Competent Authorities, crayfish plague and model health certificates for international trade in live aquatic animals and products of aquatic animal origin. As well, two new chapters on criteria to assess the safety of aquatic animal commodities and welfare of farmed fish during transport were adopted and have been added to this edition of the Aquatic Code.

The development of these standards and recommendations is the result of the continuous work of one of the OIE's Specialist Commissions, the OIE Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission (hereafter referred to as the 'Aquatic Animals Commission'). This Commission, which comprises five elected members and two observers experienced in the fields of methods for surveillance, diagnosis, control and prevention of infectious aquatic animal diseases, meets twice yearly to address its work programme. The Commission also draws upon the expertise of internationally renowned specialists to prepare draft texts for new chapters of the Aquatic Code or revise existing chapters in light of advances in veterinary science. The views of the Delegates of Members are systematically sought through the circulation of draft and revised texts. As well, the Aquatic Animals Commission collaborates closely with the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission on issues needing a harmonised approach, and with the Biological Standards Commission and the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases to ensure the Aquatic Animals Commission is using the latest scientific information in its work.

The value of the Aquatic Code lies in the fact that measures published in it are the result of consensus among the Competent Authorities of OIE Members.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) conferred on the OIE new responsibilities under international law by specifying 'the standards, guidelines and recommendations developed under the auspices of the OIE' as the international standards for animal health and zoonoses. The SPS Agreement is aimed at establishing a multilateral framework of rules and disciplines to guide the development, adoption and enforcement of sanitary measures in order to minimise their negative effects on international trade. Essentially, two options are available to Members to provide a scientific justification for an import health measure. The first, and most encouraged by the WTO, is for Competent Authorities to base their import health measures on the OIE's international standards, guidelines and recommendations. Where these do not exist, or in cases where a government chooses to apply stricter measures, the importing country must be able to show that its measure is based on a scientific assessment of the potential health risks. Guidelines for conducting risk analyses are described in the Aquatic Code. The Aquatic Code thus forms an integral part of the regulatory reference system established by the WTO.

The Aquatic Code is published annually in the three official OIE languages (English, French and Spanish). The contents of the Aquatic Code are available on the OIE Web site at <http://www.oie.int>.

The Users' Guide, which follows the foreword, is designed to help Competent Authorities and other interested parties to use the various chapters of the Aquatic Code efficiently and effectively, and to promote equitable access by all developing and developed countries to the world market in animals and animal products, according to their animal health status.

We wish to thank former and present Members of the Aquatic Animals Commission, who have contributed to producing this book and its companion volume, the Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals, for their hard work. Dr P. de Kinkelin is thanked for his initiating role, as it was under his chairmanship of the Commission that work on the two books was begun. Special thanks are also expressed to those scientific experts in different Members who provided comments and information, and finally the staff of the OIE Headquarters for their dedication in producing this 12th edition of the Aquatic Code.

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