

THE UNITED STATES COMMENTS ON THE FAO DRAFT TECHNICAL GUIDELINES FOR AQUACULTURE CERTIFICATION

January 31, 2009

The United States would like to compliment FAO for the work and efforts made to develop the Draft Technical Guidelines for Aquaculture Certification (Aquaculture Guidelines) for consideration by the Subcommittee on Aquaculture. During the most recent meeting of the Subcommittee in Puerto Varas, Chile, the United States and other country delegates decided however, that the document needs further development and modification before it can be accepted as final. The United States requests the FAO to submit an updated version of these draft guidelines, incorporating the general and specific modifications in this communication, to a Technical Consultation for the purpose of finalizing and adopting the Aquaculture Guidelines.

This document includes our recommendations for changes and edits for specific paragraphs.

General Comments

The United States believes the Aquaculture Guidelines should mirror the Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries (Ecolabelling Guidelines) to the furthest extent possible to reduce confusion on the part of eco-labelling and certification program developers and to treat wild capture and farm product alike. Wild capture and aquaculture products should be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as they are traded with little differentiation, if any at all. Definitions in the two documents and the guidelines should be consistent wherever possible.

Canada has provided detailed recommendations to bring the Aquaculture Guidelines into conformance with the Eco-labelling Guidelines; we support these recommendations.

The Aquaculture Guidelines should not include certification criteria such as social responsibility or animal welfare since there are no internationally agreed standards for either social responsibility or animal welfare at this time. Inclusion of these criteria in the certification process may lead to arbitrary assessments. These criteria are the subject of discussion in other fora which may lead to have internationally agreed standards established at a later date. At that time, one may wish to revisit their inclusion in certification guidelines.

In the Aquaculture Guidelines there are references to the need for assistance for capacity building and for small-scale farmers. The Aquaculture Guidelines imply that buyers in developed countries should provide assistance. We recognize that there is a need for assistance in the some areas and that there are assistance programs in place, however, it should not be a

criterion for certification. It may be appropriate for FAO to develop a separate document which addresses these issues specifically.

The Aquaculture Guidelines should not contain any criteria that could be interpreted as technical barriers to trade. It is important that the criteria in the Aquaculture Guidelines which will be the basis for certification are consistent with WTO rules.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS BY SECTION

Background:

4. Remove references to animal welfare and social responsibility. See General Comments.

Terms and Definitions:

General: All definitions need to be reviewed to ensure that they are the same as those used in the Eco-labelling Guidelines and other internationally agreed documents.

The term “environmental integrity” is used throughout the document. This term should be defined and should include metrics for evaluation.

Genetically Modified Organisms: This should be deleted from the terms and definitions as well as the text of the Aquaculture Guidelines. Whether or not GMOs are acceptable is a sovereign issue.

Socially responsible aquaculture: This should be deleted from the terms and definitions. While these elements included in the definition are laudable, many go beyond the scope of this document. There are no international benchmarks to measure against, and many of the issues identified are the sovereign decisions of countries.

Scope:

7. References to animal welfare and social responsibility should be deleted. As previously mentioned, environmental integrity needs to be clarified.

8. Again delete references to social responsibility. Also environmental sustainability needs to be defined and should reflect the definition in the Code of Conduct from the FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries 5-Aquaculture.

Users:

11. Producers should be added to the list of users to ensure their operations are consistent with the guidelines if they expect to be certified by a certification body.

12. Again, delete references to animal welfare and social responsibility. To be consistent with the Ecolabelling Guidelines, “any or all” should be deleted too.

Application:

No comments.

Principles:

18. The draft states that aquaculture certification schemes:

(f) The references to confidence should be deleted because confidence levels cannot be measured for purposes of certification. Certification programs will not be used if buyers have no confidence in them.

Please redraft to read:

..must be credible and robust, and effective in achieving their designated objectives.

(h) We recommend that this paragraph be deleted as traceability and certification are different issues.

(j) We recommend replacing the word “should” with “may.”
...may facilitate market access.

(k) Please delete this paragraph. This issue is outside the scope of certification guidelines. “Special considerations” for a class of producers should be dealt with elsewhere, if at all.

(l) As stated in the General Comments “Assistance and capacity building” should not be a criterion for certification.

MINIMUM SUBSTANTIVE CRITERIA

19. We again would like to delete references to animal welfare and social responsibility. Also to be consistent with the Ecolabeling Guidelines, one should not be able to pick and choose between different criteria. By removing “value” criteria such as animal welfare and social responsibility, the remaining criteria have standards which can be measured. This does not prevent a certification body from adding additional criteria; it just doesn’t require it to do so.

~~Animal Health and Welfare~~

Delete the reference to welfare in all headings.

20. Deleting the reference to welfare in the text, the paragraph should read:

..Aquaculture activities should be conducted in a manner that assures the health of farmed aquatic animals.

Minimum substantive criteria for addressing aquatic animal health ~~and welfare~~ in aquaculture certification schemes.

21. We recommend replacing the last word in the paragraph from “legislation” to “regulations or standards.”

24. Please replace with: Aquaculture facilities should stock only aquatic animals that are certified as disease-free, healthy and/or free of serious pathogens.

The term “serious pathogens” should be defined. It is not clear whether the Aquaculture Guidelines mean OIE listed pathogens, pathogens that can be managed with approved antibiotics, or other.

25. The last bullet should recognize that disease transmission can also occur from natural aquatic fauna TO aquaculture facilities. The last clause of the sentence should read:

...implementation of management practices that avoid or reduce the likelihood of disease transmission within and between aquaculture facilities and natural aquatic fauna.

27. We recommend redrafting this paragraph to read:

Responses to any disease should be immediate and effective using recommended efficient procedures, including but not limited to accelerated harvesting, fallowing, reduced feeding, or treatment with the minimal use of permitted chemicals, veterinary drugs and antibacterials.

28. Please delete this paragraph. How does one measure “suffering”? There is no accepted international standard to measure this term.

29. Again please delete. There are no accepted international standards for the terms “unnecessary stress and suffering”.

Food Safety ~~and Quality~~

This section should relate to food safety only; quality is a subjective issue. One needs to recognize that there are uses and markets for less than the “best” quality product. Many buyers will define their own quality standards and these will be negotiated between the seller and buyer. Safety is the principal area of concern for which there are national regulations and standards and agreed-upon international standards.

35. It should be emphasized that products must comply with the regulations and standards of both growing and importing countries. Please replace paragraph as follows:

All veterinary drugs and chemicals for use in aquaculture shall comply with national regulations of both importing and exporting countries, as well as international guidelines. Wherever applicable, veterinary drugs and chemicals should be registered with the competent national authority. Control of diseases with drugs should be carried out only on the basis of an accurate diagnosis and knowledge that the drug is effective for control or treatment of a specific disease. Products should only be prescribed and distributed by

personnel authorized under national regulations... Banned anti-bacterials, veterinary drugs, and/or chemicals must not be used...

36. The use of waste water in aquaculture without proper treatment should not be recommended. There are too many human and animal health risks. Include a reference to the following guidelines: WHO Guidelines for the Safe Use of Wastewater, Excreta, and Greywater. Volume III Wastewater and excreta use in aquaculture. WHO 2006

37. Criteria for the source of seed and broodstock should be identified.

38. Modify as follows:

Second bullet: the rational and use of inputs.

Third bullet: ...dosage, dosage form, and withdrawal times_of veterinary drugs, antimicrobials and chemicals.

Environmental Integrity:

40. Modify as follows:

Identification, classification of growing area and monitoring of water quality, programs...

43. This paragraph provides a list of possible negative impacts but neglects the fact that there can also be positive effects on the environment. What is an acceptable level of impacts? This will be a sovereign decision and will be delineated in national regulations and standards. Farms and product will have to be in compliance with producer and importer regulations. We feel this paragraph is unnecessary and should be removed.

47. How an individual producer meets his country's "polluter pays" principle requirements may vary significantly from country to country. Compliance with national regulations and standards should be the criterion until international standards are established. This paragraph should be redrafted or deleted.

Minimum substantive criteria for addressing environmental integrity in aquaculture certification schemes.

49. We suggest revising this paragraph to read as follows:

Environmental baseline surveys and impact assessments should be conducted, according to national legislation, prior to approval of aquaculture operations.

51. We suggest redrafting this paragraph as follows:

Routine monitoring of on-farm and off-farm environmental quality to ensure that operations are not unacceptably compromising environmental quality or degrading ecosystem services, combined with good record-keeping, and use of appropriate methodologies.

Reference to community participation in this sentence has been deleted as this has nothing to do with environmental integrity.

56. Minimize unintentional releases of cultured species into the wild. Please realize that some releases are intentional.

58. It is difficult to define “low potential risk” for the use of exotic species in the natural environment. National regulations will dictate what is allowed.

59. Please delete language regarding GMOs. National regulations will prevail.

63. Please delete this sentence. It is not clear how energy use relates to product certification.

Social Responsibility

PLEASE DELETE THIS ENTIRE SECTION. There are no similar elements in the wild-capture Ecolabelling Guidelines; there is no justification for applying these to only one segment of the fish producing community.

INSTITUTIONAL AND PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

Standard Setting

Purpose

82. A certification body could be a government organization as well.

83. Please remove reference to social responsibility and bring into conformance with Ecolabelling Guidelines language.

Normative basis

84. Add OIE reference.

Para 84: Add:

ISO/IEC 22000:2005 Food safety management systems- Requirements for any organization in the food chain.

ISO/TS 2004:2005 Food safety management systems - Guidance on the application of ISO 22000:2005

ISO/IEC 22003:2007 Food safety management systems: Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of food safety management systems.

ISO 22005:2007 Traceability in the feed and food chain - General principles and basic requirements for system design and implementation

ISO/IEC 16665 Water quality - Guidelines for quantitative sampling and sample processing of marine soft-bottom macrofauna

ISO 23893-1:2007 Water quality - Biochemical and physiological measurements on fish - Part 1: Sampling of fish, handling and preservation of samples

ISO Guide 62 has been revised; the most current document is ISO/IEC 17021:2006 Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

ISO Guide 65 is under revision and will be replaced with ISO/IEC 17065

Certification Normative references:

ISO Guide 62 has been revised; the most current document is ISO/IEC 17021:2006 Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems

ISO Guide 65 is under revision and will be replaced with ISO/IEC 17065

Add:

ISO/IEC 22003:2007 Food safety management systems: Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of food safety management systems.

Functions and organizational structure

No comments

Requirements

95. Please remove reference to animal welfare and social responsibility.

102. Modify the first bullet to read:

- Are effective in meeting the certification program goals, meaningful, objective and auditable.

Accreditation

103. Please delete reference to animal welfare and social responsibility.

131. The period of time should be specified.

155. A sub-contractor should be periodically audited and evaluated.

168 and 169: The period of certification validity should be specified.

IMPLEMENTATION

The “Implementation” section, as written, might best be separated from the guidelines as it addresses many issues that are not germane to certification. Capacity building, financial aid, development funding should be dealt with elsewhere. The section might better be titled “Capacity Building for Small Aquaculture Producers.”