



EU Policy Recommendation for **Humane Stunning** in **Commercial Fisheries**

Introduction to aquatic animal welfare & why

As the demand for seafood continues to grow globally, policy-makers have an important role to play in ensuring the welfare of aquatic animals. Fish are sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, stress, and suffering, and their treatment has ethical, environmental, and economic implications. Neglecting the welfare of aquatic animals in fisheries can lead to negative consequences such as overfishing, marine biodiversity loss, and decreased product quality. Furthermore, poor welfare practices can harm the reputation of the seafood industry, an important source of employment and economic activity for any country. Therefore, EU policy-makers should prioritize animal welfare in fisheries regulations to ensure sustainable and ethical production of seafood.

What we are asking for

One of the easiest and most effective ways for EU policy-makers to improve the welfare of aquatic animals in commercial fisheries is to introduce legislation that mandates humane stunning and slaughter practices. Such practices are already required for most farmed land animals and for some farmed fish in the EU. It should be mandated for wild-caught fish as well. Humane stunning involves rendering the aquatic animal fully unconscious, and ensuring that the animal remains unconscious until death. There are several methods of stunning already [available for commercial](#) fisheries and for most aquatic species. By requiring this practice, EU policy-makers can ensure that one of the worst stressors in the capture process for wild-caught fish is avoided.

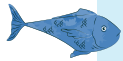
While EU animal welfare legislation (Council Regulation No 1099/2009) requires sparing farmed animals, including farmed fish, from avoidable pain, stress, and suffering during slaughter, it lacks specific requirements for fish (and excludes wild caught fish). The responsibility for stunning fish is left to national legislation, and only a few member states mandate it.

Legislation should require the use of electrical or mechanical stunning technology for commercial fish species as it is readily available. For species where knowledge gaps exist, governments and industry should provide funding to develop effective, humane, and economically-viable stunning methods.



Policy language examples

We advocate for mandatory stunning pre-slaughter in capture fisheries under European Union legislation. We call for European regulations to align with guidelines set by the [World Organisation for Animal Health \(WOAH\) Aquatic Animal Health Code](#) as minimum standards, while taking the following additional language into consideration:



To ensure the humane treatment of aquatic animals caught by fishing vessels, all operators must stun the animals before slaughter. This requirement applies to all commercial licensed fishing vessels irrespective of vessel length or tonnage.



The true unconsciousness of the animal (e.g. not only immobilizing the animal) by a certain technology must be confirmed prior to commercialization of said technology.



The choice of the stunning method needs to take species-specific parameters where available and shall render the animal consciousness until death.



A backup stunning system is necessary. Any aquatic animal that is misstunned or regains consciousness before death should be re-stunned as soon as possible.



All handling, stunning and slaughter equipment should be maintained and operated appropriately; it should be tested on a regular basis to ensure that performance is adequate.



Training should be provided for personnel on effective use of stunning equipment and to check for signs of consciousness after administering the stun.



There should be further research to develop effective, humane and commercially-viable methods of stunning wild-caught fish.

Conclusion

Stunning legislation can have positive economic and environmental impacts beyond ethical treatment of animals. Improved animal welfare practices can lead to [higher product quality](#), longer shelf life, and more sustainable production of seafood. It is a simple, yet powerful way for EU policy-makers to ensure the long term viability of the seafood industry and improve the welfare of aquatic animals.

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