

Aquatic Commission and code: Update and Workplan

Workshop on enhancing aquatic animal health and biosecurity

26-29 October 2025, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

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Member, WOA Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission



World
Organisation
for Animal
Health

Organisation
mondiale
de la santé
animale

Organización
Mundial
de Sanidad
Animal



وزارة البيئة والمياه والزراعة
Ministry of Environment Water & Agriculture

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia المملكة العربية السعودية



Purpose of the Aquatic Standards

- Improvement of aquatic animal health and welfare worldwide
- Used by Members for disease prevention, early detection, reporting and disease control
- Ensure the safety of international trade in aquatic animals and aquatic animal products while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers.

Commission Work Mechanism

Composition & Term

- Composed of six members: President, two Vice-Presidents, and three Members.
- Members are elected for a **three-year term** by the World Assembly of Delegates.

Standard-Setting Function

- The **only** body responsible for proposing revisions and new chapters for the *Aquatic Code* and *Aquatic Manual* to the World Assembly.
- Considers reports from **ad hoc Groups, Working Groups, and WOAHA Reference Centres** to gather scientific input.
- Examines and responds to **comments from Member Countries** on draft texts.

Meeting Schedule

- The Commission meets formally **twice a year** (bi-annually) in person, typically in **February** and **September**, at the WOAHA Headquarters in Paris.
- Each meeting lasts approximately **6 to 8 full working days**.
- Work is progressed between meetings via virtual consultations and reviews of documents.

Work Programme/Prioritisation criteria

- Within the remit of the Commission
- Aligned with WOAHA strategies or conference recommendations
- Supported by or requested by Members, WOAHA DG
- Task is defined and achievable within the available resources and timeframes
- High importance to the quality of the standards
- Impact for Members is worth the investment of resources
- Meets ongoing commitments



Key activities – Aquatic Code and Manual

**2025****2012 - 2013**

2 additional chapters
on AMR/AMU (2012)
and chapter on
compartments (2013)

2016 - 2017

Disinfection chapter
(2016) and revised
listing criteria (2017)

2022

Revised
surveillance
chapter
OIE became WOAH

Emergency preparedness,
outbreak management,
trade in genetic materials,
and movement of
ornamental species.
Updated BBC and TS.

**2009**

Criteria for safe
commodities,
hazards in feed and
2 chapters on fish
welfare

**2014 - 2015**

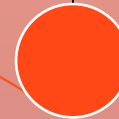
Criteria for listing
species as
susceptible (2014)
and control of
hazards in feed
(2015)

**2019**

Biosecurity for
aquaculture
establishments

**2024**

Revision safe
commodities



Key Amendments Adopted to Aquatic Code and Manual - 92nd General Session (held in Paris, May 25-29, 2025)

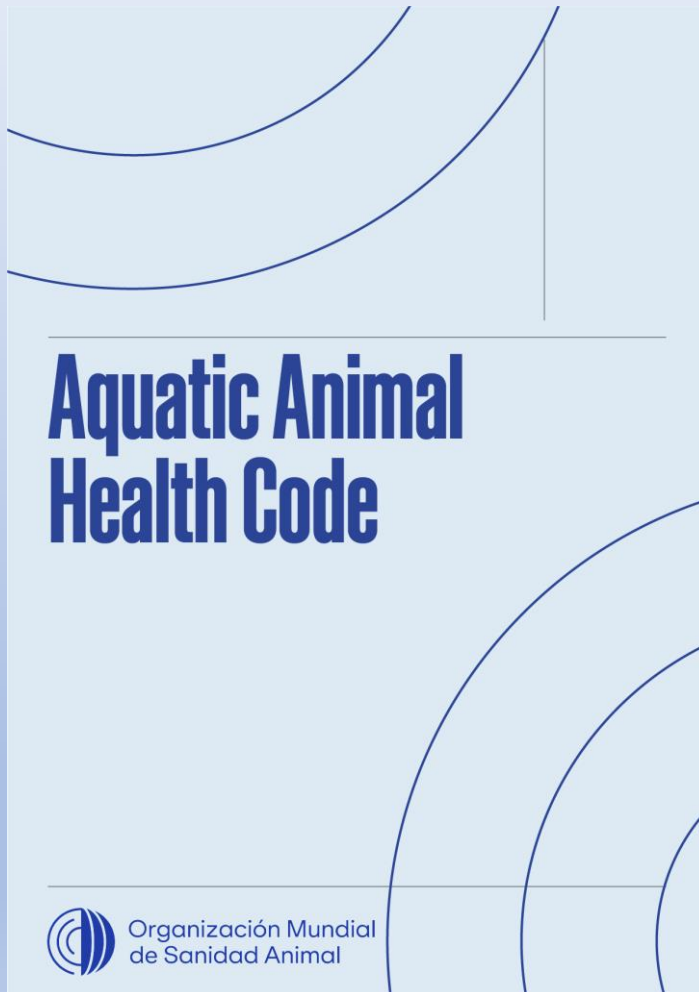
- **Amendments adopted for the Aquatic Code include:**

- New Chapter 4.X. 'Emergency disease preparedness'
- New Chapter 4.Y. 'Disease outbreak management'
- New Chapter 4.Z. 'Control of pathogenic agents in traded gametes and fertilised eggs of fish'
- New Chapter 5.X. 'Movement of ornamental aquatic animals'
- New Chapter 10.X. 'Infection with Megalocytivirus pagrus1'

- **Amendments adopted for the Aquatic Manual include:**

- Chapter 2.2.9. 'Infection with white spot syndrome virus': Sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2. were updated
- Chapter 2.3.1. 'Infection with yellowhead disease virus': Sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.2. were updated
- Chapter 2.4.3. 'Infection with Bonamia ostreae': This chapter was comprehensively revised to update scientific information and align with the new disease chapter template.
- New Chapter 2.4.X. 'Infection with Bonamia exitiosa' New Chapter 2.4.Y. 'Infection with Perkinsus marinus'

WOAH Aquatic Code



- Provides standards for safe trade
- A harmonized approach to sanitary measures
- General provisions including notification of listed diseases, risk analysis, quality of Aquatic Animal Health Services, disease prevention, emergency preparedness and outbreak response, trade, AMU, welfare.
- Disease-specific provisions including susceptible species, sage commodities, declarations of freedom, recommendations for trade of commodities.



- **Aquatic Code (1995)**
- **'Notifiable diseases' - 11**
 - 5 fish diseases
 - 6 molluscan diseases
 - 0 crustacean diseases
 - Amphibians not in scope
 - 13 'other significant diseases'
- **General provisions – 12 chapters**
 - 2 on ethics and certification
 - 4 on import risk analysis
 - 6 on import/export measures

Aquatic Code (2025)

- **Listed diseases - 31**
 - 11 fish diseases
 - 7 molluscan diseases
 - 10 crustacean diseases
 - 3 amphibians diseases
- **General provisions – 41 chapters**
 - 5 on notification and certification
 - 1 on import risk analysis
 - 2 on quality of aquatic animal health services
 - 12 on disease prevention and control
 - 12 on trade measures
 - 4 on welfare of farmed fish
 - 4 on antimicrobial use in aquatic animals

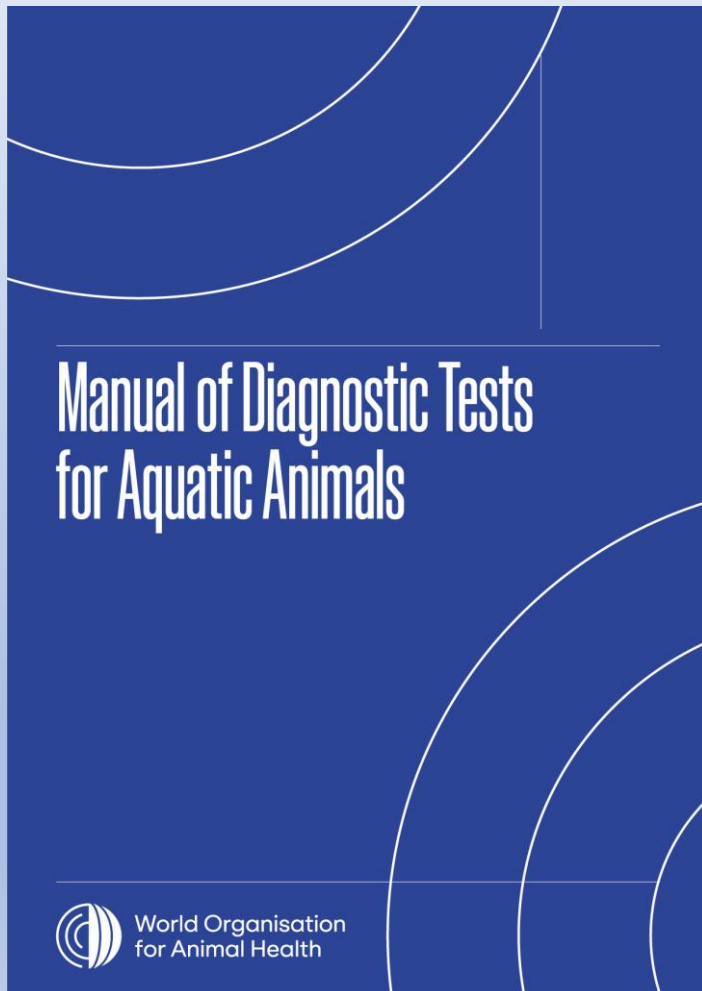
Aquatic Code – Technical Work in Progress

- **Chapter 4.3 – Compartmentalisation:** Substantial revision clarifying independent/dependent compartments and risk analysis principles
- **Chapter 4.7 – Fallowing in aquaculture:** Updated to align with new chapters on emergency preparedness and outbreak management
- **Section 5 – Trade measures:** Proposed complete restructuring for clarity and alignment with terrestrial standards
- **Chapter 9.2 – Crayfish plague:** Updated susceptible species lists using new taxonomic criteria
- **Chapter 10.3 – Gyrodactylus salaris:** Pathway 2 (historical freedom) allowed only for *Atlantic salmon*
- **Chapter 10.4 – Infectious salmon anaemia:** Surveillance period extended to 2 years for compartments free of HPR0 variant
- **Viral taxonomy:** Updated names of 12 listed viral agents to match the latest ICTV taxonomy
- **Glossary:** Revised definition of *ornamental aquatic animals*

Aquatic Code – Ongoing and New Work

- Major scientific review to update **fish welfare (Section 7)** chapters.
- Planned revision of **Chapter 4.2 – Zoning and compartmentalization**
- Draft **introductory chapter for Section 5** to clarify trade procedures
- Revision of **Chapter 6.2 – Responsible use of antimicrobials** to align with terrestrial standards
- Plans to review **susceptible species** via a standing ad hoc Group
- Joint revision of **Chapter 1.1 – Disease notification** in alignment with the terrestrial counterpart
- Continued review of the **scientific basis of listing susceptible species at genus level**. Susceptible species: application of Ch 1.5. to each disease-specific chapter to determine the susceptible host species. 4 of 31 diseases remain to be assessed.

WOAH Aquatic Manual



- Provides standards for diagnosis
- General provisions including quality management for laboratories and principles and methods of validations.
- Disease-specific provisions including disease information, host factors, epidemiology, specimen collection, diagnostic methods, recommendations for purpose of use and case definitions.

Aquatic Manual – Major Updates

- Aquatic Manual reformat
- Continuation of the process to progressively reformat and review each disease-specific chapter of the Aquatic Manual into a new template – the goal of a **fully harmonised, reformatted Manual by 2026**
- Chapters now follow a **unified structure** with standardised sections
 1. Aetiological agent
 2. Host range
 3. Diagnostic methods
 4. Validation and performance characteristics
 5. Case definitions
 6. References
- Two of 30 disease-specific chapters remain to be reformatted (*infection with Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* and *Ranavirus species*), while two **new chapters** are under development (*infection with tilapia lake virus* and *infection with Megalocytivirus pagrus1*).

Aquatic Manual – Diagnostic Methodology Updates

- Across all reviewed chapters, the Commission emphasized:
- Greater **clarity in diagnostic case definitions** (suspect vs confirmed cases)
- Clear distinction between **screening** (e.g., PCR) and **confirmatory tests** (e.g., sequencing, histology, in situ hybridization)
- Harmonisation of **molecular diagnostics** with the WOAHA framework for assay validation (soon to be outlined in new Chapter 1.1.2, “Validation of diagnostic assays for infectious diseases of aquatic animals”)
- Inclusion of updated **PCR protocols and genetic target regions**, ensuring detection specificity amid emerging genomic data (e.g., endogenous viral elements).



Aquatic Manual – Viral Taxonomy Updates

- Reviewed against the **International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV)** 2025 classification
- Of 18 WOAHA-listed viral pathogens, **12** required updated names
- Changes applied to both the *Aquatic Code* and *Manual* for consistency
- Standardized naming now aligns with ICTV conventions and removes redundant taxonomic references (e.g., virus “Order” references removed)



Members of AAHSC (New term: 2024-2027)



Dr Kevin William Christison
(South Africa)
Member

Dr Hong Liu
(People's Rep of China)
Member

Dr Alicia Gallardo Lagno
(Chile)
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Dr Saraya Tavoranpanich
(Norway)
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Dr Ingo Ernst
(Australia)
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Dr Fiona Geoghegan
(Ireland)
Vice-President

Conclusions

- WOAHA aquatic standards represent an agreed approach to improve aquatic animal health globally.
- The standards provide a harmonised approach to manage the risks of disease spread associated with spread.
- The standards must continue to evolve as the aquaculture industry evolves and as new scientific information becomes available.
- The development of the standards takes time, so it is advisable to think ahead and anticipate what may be needed.

Thank you!

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