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WOAH
FOCAL POINTS AQUATIC ANIMAL
WORKSHOP – IV cycle
18-20 October 2023

Introduction

Since the 76th General Session of the World Assembly of National Delegates in May 2008, the Delegates are requested to nominate focal points to help them in their work on specific issues. While focal points serve primarily as a means for improved communication between Members and the WOA, their functions also include establishing networks and improved communications at country level between two or more Competent Authorities. WOA strengthens the network of focal points in their respective areas of competence, mainly through training courses and workshops at regional and sub-regional levels. These seminars raise awareness about regional and global issues and concerns outside of the national context. The seminars provide specialised and horizontal training across the WOA mandate on topics relevant to their area of expertise. After the 2019 OIE Global Conference on Aquatic Animal Health, which was held in Chile, the OIE Aquatic Animals Commission, together with OIE staff, have worked to develop the OIE Aquatic Animal Health Strategy to enable Veterinary Services to meet the opportunities and the challenges of the worldwide growth in aquaculture and to improve the aquatic animal health. An online seminar was held between Aquatic Animal Health Focal Points in 2021. It was the time to have a look at the situation in the application of the aquatic strategy and reaffirm the exchange of information through networking in the Europe region through a training of WOA aquatic animals' health focal points in person.

53 countries of the Europe region have been invited to this workshop. The countries who participated are Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malta, Montenegro, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, United Kingdom, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

Simultaneous interpretation in Russian, have been provided.

Summary

The event opened with greetings from the mayor of Chioggia who gave patronage to the event, greetings from the director of the veterinary Institute of the Venezie Antonia Ricci who supported in the logistics for the organization of the event, with greetings from the director of the Veterinary Institute of Umbria and Marche Giovanni Pezzotti who collaborated in organizing the event.

The moderator of the event has been the representative of the WOA Subregional office in Central Asia Mereke Taitubayev.

The workshop saw some frontal presentations and some working groups led by the experts.



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The agenda was made up of five different topics:

- Setting the scene: the situation of the Aquatic Animal Health in Europe
- Management of Aquatic Animal Disease outbreaks
- Aquatic Animal Disease One Health problems: Antibiotic resistance
- Aquatic animal welfare
- Capacity building

In the first part of the workshop the situation of aquatic animal diseases was illustrated according to the data collected by WAHIS. There is still evidence of non-continuous and complete use of the system. At the same time, the activities within the WOAHA Aquatic Animal Health Strategy to overcome these and other problems were illustrated. The Survey of National Focal Points regarding 5 topics (Disease surveillance and national reporting, Disease notification to WOAHA, Barriers to the implementation of Standards, PVS Pathway Aquatic and Capacity building) which highlighted regional differences in capacity and identified priorities between WOAHA Regions was presented. Still from a strategic perspective from Aquatic Animal Health the Standards Commission has illustrated what the latest activities were and what the future activities are including highlighting the standards. WOAHA aquatic standards represent an agreed approach to improve aquatic animal health globally, provide a harmonized approach to manage the risks of disease spread associated with trade, it must continue to evolve as the aquaculture industry evolves and new scientific information becomes available, and as the standards development takes time it needed to anticipate future needs.

During the management of the Aquatic Animal Disease (AAD) outbreaks section a series of presentations provided participants with vital information on fish diseases affecting the European region and the associated biosafety standards. This knowledge equips nations with the tools they need to develop targeted and effective strategies for disease prevention and management. The presentations covered the early detection, the correct diagnosis, the correct therapy and all the measures important to avoid that a disease enter or spread from a farm (biosecurity), including the vaccination. In this context the general principles of biosecurity plans and their evaluation, a systematic approach for quantifying biosecurity measures, a series of factors that are fundamentals for success and the challenges to apply the biosecurity measures in the farms were discussed. A presentation that summarized the WOAHA rules for efficient surveillance system for AAD, that described the different pathways for disease-free self-declaration and that briefly compared WOAHA rules for surveillance with the European ones was discussed. The presentations covered even the activities of the project led by IZSUM "Integrated strategies for reduction of the use of the drug in aquaculture" with the topic of an improvement of the vaccination for prevention.

The third section of the meeting was dedicated to the promotion of the prudent use of antimicrobials in aquaculture. Antimicrobial resistance is a global public health concern, and its implications extend to aquaculture. To address this issue, the workshop placed a strong emphasis on educating participants about the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials in aquaculture. By promoting the judicious use of antibiotics, the workshop aimed to mitigate the emergence of drug-resistant pathogens and safeguard the long-term sustainability of the industry.

The principles, actions, and new rules for the correct application of welfare in aquaculture in all its steps, breeding, transport, slaughter, were the topics of the fourth session. Welfare has become one of the most important factors for production and for trade. From the breeder it is important to fix the equivalence that good production is possible only where there is good welfare. For the veterinarian avoid unnecessary suffering and chronic stress and distress It's part of their routine job. The EU Guidelines on water quality and handling for the welfare of farmed vertebrate fish was presented. A special lecture was made on the indicators of welfare studied during the projects FISHWELL and Laksvel in Norway.

Finally, the importance of the PVS aquatic tool and the formation of a network of aquatic animal focal points and the involvement of the environmental sector was highlighted during the capacity building session.



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WOAH has 4 collaborating centers about Aquatic Animal Health (AAH): Aquaculture Emerging Aquatic Animal Diseases in UK, Epidemiology and Risk Assessment of Aquatic Animal Diseases (Americas), in Canada, Epidemiology and Risk Assessment of Aquatic Animal Diseases (Europe) in Norway and Antimicrobial Stewardship in Aquaculture in Chile. The Activities between them was described, including the activities of the Norway CC with AQMENET (Aquaculture Middle East Network), the activities with the network in the Aquaculture Centre in Asia-Pacific (NACA), with FAO and with COST ACTION. The second networking presented was the Asia-Pacific Aquatic Animal Health Network (AP AquaNet) actives to support the AAH activities in Asia and the Pacific. It focuses on the increase in emerging disease occurrence but with limited resources to contrast them, on the need for improved transparency of aquatic animal disease information and on the lack of coordination mechanism among stakeholders. The network has a steering committee and a secretariat that looks for a platform for sharing training materials and scientific information on aquatic animal health and produces a Regional Aquatic Animal Disease Report. In this session even the experience of the Italian IIZZSS (Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali) networking has been presented. Two projects are carried out by the network. First the "Evaluation of Epidemiological Cut Offs (ECOFF) for the execution of Minimal Inhibitory Concentrations (M.I.C.) against the main bacterial pathogens of fish" about the prudent use of the antibiotics in aquaculture. Second the "Strengthening capacity on aquatic animal health and epidemiological surveillance" (Aqua Strength): An international cooperation project as a model for networking among countries and stakeholders. The project is financed by the Italian Ministry of Health and supported by the World Organization for Animal Health. A brief but important presentation was made on the way to build a possible network with environmental science. This presentation covered the actions done and the possible activities where the environment organizations and agencies can collaborate.

A field visit was included in the program to visit the zones in the close lagoon used for the shellfish harvesting and to explain the aquaculture activities carried out in the lagoon of Venice.

Exercise held during the seminar

The agenda included group exercises about four different scenarios on fish mortalities and the task was to identify important components of a staged approach to confirm that there was an infectious agent spreading and what technical and financial resources it is necessary to resolve the problems. All groups showed an excellent ability to apply knowledge correctly and the answers were similar, showing a good level of knowledge among all participants. The three main points raised in the answers have been:

To avoid movement of animals as the main biosecurity measures to apply

To have an adequate budget for the laboratories

To have a supporting legislation for depopulation of animals and for compensation



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Outcome of the workshop

The workshop yielded a range of positive outcomes, significantly advancing the field of aquaculture:

- Increased knowledge of new fish diseases: participants left the workshop with an enriched understanding of emerging fish diseases, facilitating early detection, prevention, and effective management.
- Enhanced awareness of welfare in aquaculture: the workshop emphasized the significance of animal welfare in aquaculture practices, encouraging the development of more humane and sustainable systems.
- Improved aquaculture health management: a better understanding of health management in aquaculture allows participants to make informed decisions, develop effective strategies, and ensure the welfare of aquatic animals.
- Strengthened knowledge of biosecurity: biosecurity is a critical component of disease prevention. The workshop provided participants with insights into biosecurity measures to protect aquatic animals from diseases.
- Heightened focus on AMR issues: addressing AMR is vital for the long-term sustainability of aquaculture. Participants gained knowledge about responsible antimicrobial use and strategies to combat AMR.
- Implementation of best practices: the workshop encouraged the implementation of best practices, enabling countries to enhance the efficiency, sustainability, and resilience of their aquaculture sectors.
- Fostering knowledge sharing: the event served as a platform for national Focal Points to share knowledge, experiences, and best practices, fostering international cooperation and collaboration.

Feedback of the workshop

The Regional Workshop for WOAHA National Focal Points for Aquatic Animals IV Cycle stands as a testament to the collective commitment to advancing the health and welfare of aquatic animals. The outcomes of the event, including increased knowledge, the implementation of best practices, and knowledge sharing, have not only benefited the participants' countries but also contributed to the overarching goal of WOAHA's Aquatic Animal Health Strategy. This workshop demonstrated the power of international cooperation in addressing critical challenges in aquaculture and ensuring the well-being of aquatic animals on a global scale. As the aquaculture industry continues to grow and evolve, events like these serve as a crucial cornerstone in fostering a sustainable and responsible approach to aquatic animal health and welfare.

Follow up of the seminar

To create a network between all the focal points in Europe, 3 regional webinars on Aquatic Animal Health are planned in 2024.



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