

Do we have practical positive and negative welfare indicators for fish that we can use in a research/farm setting?

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In 1999, the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) was approached by a Scottish salmon producer, and asked to produce a set of welfare standards for farmed Atlantic salmon. Three years later the standards were launched, and are now used by a significant proportion of the Scottish salmon industry. Until recently, we have largely relied upon the input nature of the standards, to provide us with an assessment of the welfare of the fish. However, the evidence from research into dairy cows, pigs and laying hens, strongly suggests that using input standards alone, might not be the best way to assess farm animal welfare.

The RSPCA co-funded some research in 2003, whereby the University of Bristol developed a protocol for assessing the welfare of farm animals using a number of measurable welfare indicators. This protocol became known as the Bristol Welfare Assurance Programme (BWAP), which itself has fed into the European Welfare Quality project, which aims to deliver a European standard for welfare assessment systems.

The RSPCA believes that all farm assurance has to progress from just using input standards to assess animal welfare, to using a combination of input standards and measurable welfare indicators.

The aim of the presentation is to evaluate whether a system of welfare assessment developed for terrestrial species, is applicable to fish.