

Video – What is Fish Welfare

Transcript

Prof. Amaya Albalat

So animal welfare encompass the physical and emotional state of an animal its ability to cope with the external events and its overall quality of life. Now there are different frameworks of models that have been developed for animal welfare management. The Five Freedom was the first widely accepted evidence-based framework that manages to capture all the different aspects that we should consider when thinking about animal welfare and includes the freedom from hunger and thirst, the freedom from discomfort, the freedom to express normal behaviours - and that means that we have a knowledge on what are the behaviours of the particular species that we are working on so that we are able to provide situations and an environment where these animals are able to express those behaviours, the freedom from injury pain or disease - that means again that we have mechanisms in place for the prevention, or for rapid diagnostic and treatment of the animals, and finally the freedom from fear and distress, which means that we are ensuring that the protocols that we have in place avoid as much as possible mental suffering. Now originally, frameworks that we had on animal welfare management were very much focused on avoiding poor welfare, but we see that nowadays the frameworks are also facilitating for us that we take into consideration those situations where the welfare of the animal is not only compromised and we are not only meeting the physical needs of the animals but also that we are promoting situations and we are promoting conditions where the animals are experiencing positive welfare conditions, positive welfare events, and also that we are catering for their well-being, so positive well-being.

Prof. Jimmy Turnbull

Why should you improve fish welfare? Well some people think we've got a duty to take care of the welfare of animals we grow, that includes farmed fish and as a result of this many international markets are now requiring that people provide evidence that the fish have been reared in a welfare friendly environment. But even if you don't sell to international markets there's plenty of reasons why you should take care of the fish and look after their welfare. If you take care of them properly, they will grow well, they'll use their food more efficiently, you'll get a better paid conversion ratio, you get fewer diseases and better survival, and at the end of the day you're going to a better product which is worth more

How can you improve the welfare of farmed fish? Well improving the welfare or protecting the welfare of fish requires that you take care of them throughout their life and that means virtually everything you do on the farm can affect the welfare of the fish, but to take just a few examples; making sure you feed them properly, this is not only that you give them high quality feed which meets all the requirements but also that you feed regularly enough and that the feed is dispersed so all the fish have access to it; biosecurity is very important making sure that diseases don't get into the farm or making sure that diseases don't get as well as you can, perhaps vaccinating the fish to protect them from diseases; also protecting them from predators, stopping birds or mammals or anything getting in and attacking or damaging them; and finally providing them with a humane harvest or humane slaughter. This means that they have to be rendered unconscious very rapidly and mustn't regain consciousness until death happens.

Prof. Sonia Rey Planellas

We want to measure welfare in a way that is as reliable as possible we normally use operational welfare indicators for that and they can be developed for each of the different species we want to measure, so operational welfare indicators should have some specific characteristics for their use in farms. One of the main characteristics should be that they are easy to measure in a normal farm environment and by the staff that is working with the fish. Another characteristic too is to be relevant to the welfare of the species. Of course we actually want to be mostly non-invasive and also non-lethal so we don't have to kill or handle the animals to measure them. We want them to be visual if possible because we don't have to take the animals out of the water or manipulate them. And this all these characteristics of the operational welfare indicators all relate to the five freedoms that we were talking before, so some examples of operational welfare indicators could be mortalities, it could be fin damage, skin colour, abnormal behaviours of the animals, or for example external injuries. We usually score them and that helps to assess the overall overall welfare of the fish.