

UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION - 2004

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 14 **APPROVED**

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE

SUBJECT MATTER: RISK ASSESSMENT IN AQUATIC ANIMAL HEALTH

DATES: OCTOBER 27, 2004

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The life-cycles and survival parameters of exotic finfish viruses are not well understood. This makes the application of risk assessment to even the most studied models difficult. Risk analysis is a tool to help decision makers. There will always be a need for supportive actions to help solve the problems generated by the process of risk analysis. There have been reports of difficulties in carrying out existing risk analysis methods.

The stability of infectious agents in different media and under different physical and chemical environments has been extensively studied for some viruses and virtually ignored for others. Gaps in the knowledge are due in part to difficulties in reproducing life cycles and determining whether the agent is inactive or otherwise unable to cause significant fish health problems. Isolation of the agent under certain conditions can present significant challenges. Studies on the susceptibility of viruses to different physical or chemical parameters have often been conducted under artificial conditions and quantitative data on the rate of inactivation are lacking for many agents. To assess the potential risk for the introduction and establishment of an exotic finfish virus in an aquatic ecosystem, several factors associated with the agent must be determined. These factors include the liability of the agent to pH, cooling, freezing, heating, and the ability of the agent to survive freely in the environment.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests that the United States Department Agriculture (USDA), Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) determine if these data needed to perform credible risk assessments exist and identify information gaps. Appropriate steps should be taken to fill in these gaps for the prevention of the introduction and the potential establishment of finfish viruses of economic significance into the U.S. commercial farmed fish industry.

RESPONSE:

The Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services is currently in the process of identifying key pathogens of economic significance for all sectors of the U.S. commercial farmed aquatic animal industries. These pathogens are identified through working groups that are held for the various aquaculture commodity groups, as part of the development of a National Aquatic Animal Health Plan (NAAHP). Additionally, the Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH), Center for Emerging Issues (CEI) is completing a methods development project to forecast disease emergence in the food fish industry. CEI has described characteristics of disease emergence factors. CEI is in the process of finalizing a matrix for scoring disease emergence potential in a qualitative risk assessment process.

At this time, APHIS is not in a position to conduct gap analyses or risk assessments for specific viral pathogens of economic significance to the farmed food fish industry. However, once a draft NAAHP is complete, and should Agency funding and personnel be adequate to implement and support the program, APHIS will conduct the gap assessments for viruses identified through the NAAHP developmental processes.