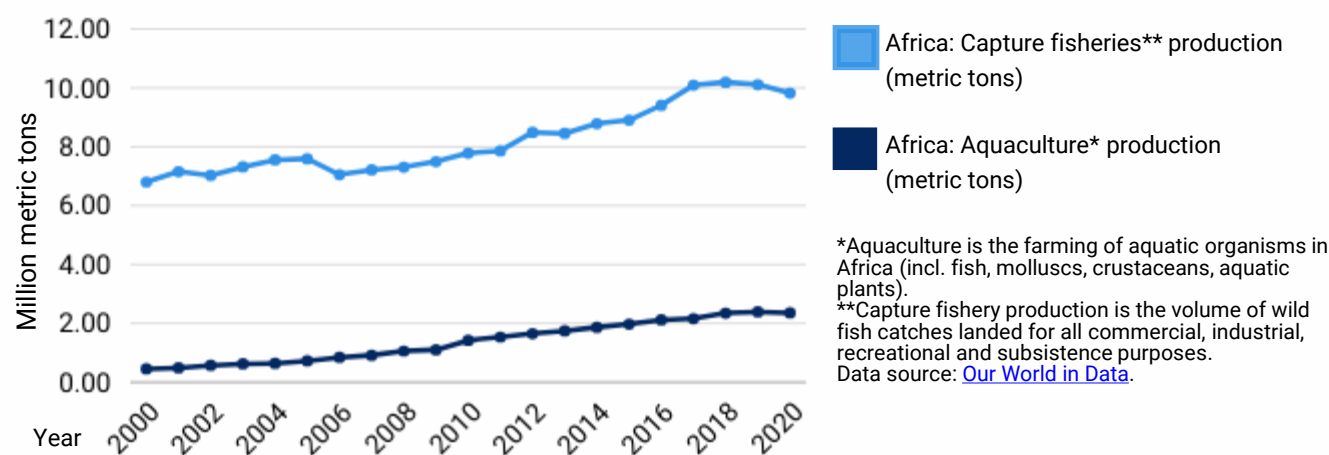


Aquatic Animal Welfare in Africa

Preamble: This factsheet enshrines the shared view of the African Union-InterAfrican Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and Ethical Seafood Research (ESR) regarding the welfare of aquatic animals. Taking into account the contents of key AU-IBAR guiding documents relating to aquatic animals including the Policy Framework and Reform Strategy and the Animal Welfare Strategy, this factsheet encompasses all uses of aquatic animals in Africa with a primary focus on capture fisheries and aquaculture. However, both parties recognise the important welfare issues facing aquatic animals in the so-called 'ornamental' trade. This factsheet aims to highlight the importance of aquatic animal welfare in Africa and raise awareness about the need for its preservation.



Aquatic animals, including fish, shellfish, and marine mammals, play a vital role in the ecosystems of Africa. At the same time, the production and consumption of foods derived from aquatic animals continues to grow rapidly, making important contributions to human nutrition, poverty alleviation and sustainable development. However, in order to truly meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is important to improve how we treat the aquatic animals affected by human activities. With this in mind, AU-IBAR and ESR emphasise the close relationship between the health and welfare of animals and the health and wellbeing of people and the planet.

Preserving the welfare of aquatic animals in Africa is vital for maintaining healthy ecosystems, ensuring sustainable fisheries and promoting responsible aquaculture development. By recognising the importance of aquatic animal welfare and taking action to safeguard it, our actions can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible future for Africa's aquatic ecosystems and the livelihoods of people who depend on them.



Ecosystem Health: Aquatic animals contribute to the overall health and balance of aquatic ecosystems. They play essential roles as prey and predators, maintaining food webs, nutrient cycling, and ecosystem stability. Ensuring the welfare of aquatic animals helps maintain the ecological integrity and resilience of marine and freshwater habitats.



Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture: Africa's fisheries and aquaculture provide a vital source of food, livelihoods, and income for millions of people. Responsible and humane treatment of aquatic animals is crucial for sustainable fisheries management and responsible aquaculture development. In order to safeguard the welfare of aquatic animals and thereby preserve the livelihoods of coastal communities, priority should be placed on practices that limit overfishing, promote the handling of animals with care, minimise the capture of non-target animals and incentivise the use of selective and appropriate fishing gear.



Conservation: Many aquatic animal species in Africa face significant threats, including illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, habitat degradation, pollution, climate change, and illegal wildlife trade. The preservation of Africa's rich aquatic natural heritage and biodiversity can be achieved by focusing on aquatic animal welfare through the protection of critical habitats, implementation of sustainable fishing practices and combatting illegal wildlife trade.



Aquatic Animal Health and Welfare Standards: The use of aquatic animals for food or other human activities or any other purpose carries the ethical responsibility to avoid the unnecessary suffering of these animals. As with all animals, the Relationship between health and welfare is also critical for aquatic animals. As such, it is essential to develop and implement comprehensive standards and regulations that cover the health and welfare needs of this unique group of animals. For aquaculture, such standards should cover particularly stressful activities such as handling, transport, culling, stunning and slaughter. Other key welfare issues to address for aquaculture include access to appropriate water quality and feed as well as the prevention of injuries. For capture fisheries, it is recommended to use appropriate fishing gear or technology such as avoiding the use of monofilament fishing nets to reduce unnecessary stress to the captured animal. By promoting humane treatment, we can minimise the unnecessary suffering of aquatic animals bringing our activities in line with the World Organisation for Animal Health standards such as the Aquatic Animal Health Code.



Economic Benefits: Poor welfare of aquatic animals can increase their susceptibility to infection thereby endangering both animal and human health and welfare. In contrast, aquatic animal welfare can have positive economic impacts such as the need to use antimicrobial agents and reducing mass mortality events. Well-managed fisheries and aquaculture operations that prioritise animal welfare attract conscientious consumers and can improve market access. Additionally, eco-tourism opportunities related to aquatic animals, such as snorkelling around coral reefs and whale watching, can generate revenue and support local communities. The responsible care of aquatic animals is important to ensuring public health, food safety, biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.



Education and Awareness: Raising awareness about aquatic animal health and welfare is crucial. Educational programs and campaigns can inform stakeholders, including fishers, fish farmers, policymakers, and consumers, about the importance of ethical treatment and responsible practices. Fostering a culture that appreciates the intrinsic value of aquatic animals can inspire positive change and encourage sustainable resource use.



International Cooperation: Effective collaboration between African nations, regional bodies, and international organisations is essential for addressing aquatic animal welfare issues effectively. Sharing knowledge, best practices and resources can help build capacity, develop ambitious regulations, and improve aquatic animal health and welfare standards across the continent.