



# Compassion Investigates

CIWF undercover investigation into Czech carp farming

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**FRONT COVER IMAGE:** Sorting ramp in a carp farm: carp are kept outside the water for prolonged period of time, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.



Carp severely overcrowded in holding tanks after being collected from the outdoor ponds, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

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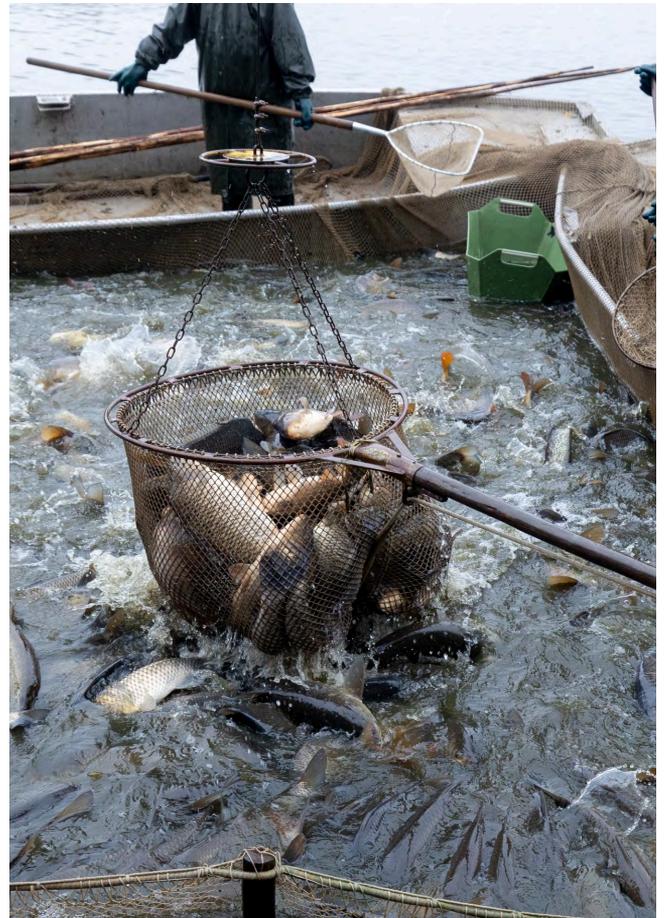
# Executive Summary

## Carp are the most farmed fish in Czechia, representing around 85% of its aquaculture production

In Czechia, as in other Central European countries, carp are a traditional Christmas dish. It is very common for carp to be sold in street stalls in the weeks before Christmas and for some customers to walk away with live fish before slaughtering them at home, exposing millions of carp each year to serious welfare risks. Only a small proportion of carp are slaughtered and processed in slaughterhouses.

In 2024, Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) conducted an undercover investigation at three Czech carp farms to document the processes experienced by fish from farm to live sale. The investigation found severe welfare concerns at several stages of the production cycle, including when carp are taken out of the pond, sorted, transported, slaughtered and sold live to consumers.

CIWF calls on the new Czech government to ban the sale of live fish to consumers and calls on the European Union (EU) institutions to quickly adopt enforceable, species-specific animal welfare regulation for aquatic animals covering, among others, stocking density, water quality, handling requirements during transport and slaughter practices. These policies would protect the welfare of up to 1 billion fish, including carp, that are farmed annually in the EU.

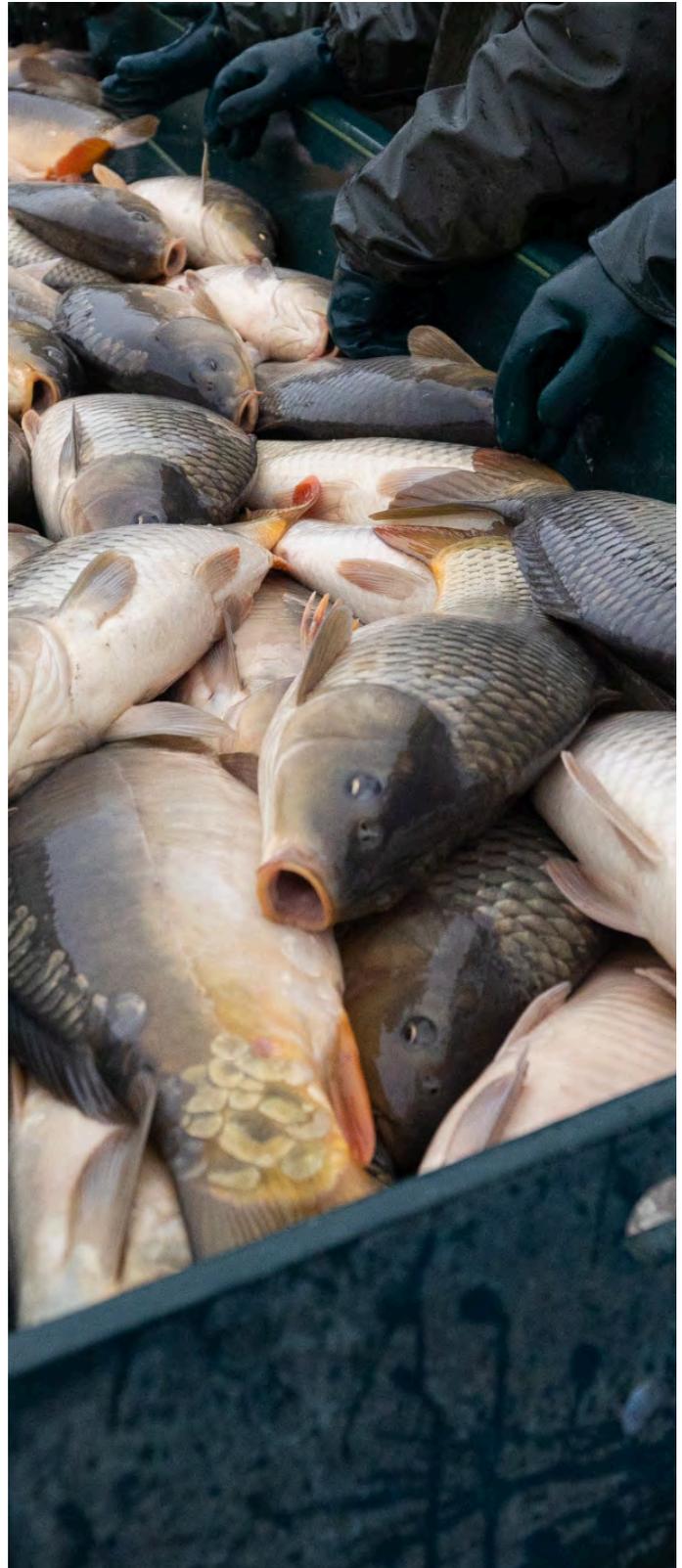


Carp being collected from outdoor ponds by hand nets and lifting devices, piled on each other, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

**"The investigation found severe welfare concerns at several stages of the production cycle, including when carp are taken out of the pond"**

# Background

Despite a strong scientific consensus that fish are sentient (1,2,3), and this being recognised in EU law since 2009 (4), farmed fish still lack specific, enforceable legal protection (5,6). This leaves up to 1.1 billion fish farmed in the EU each year (7) vulnerable to many practices that compromise their welfare (8). Throughout their life, farmed fish are exposed daily to multiple stressors, ranging from poor water quality to rough handling procedures, extended time out of water, prolonged fasting periods, stressful transport, barren rearing environments, and inhumane slaughter (9,10). Such practices do not reflect the will of 9 out of 10 EU citizens who support stronger protection for farmed fish, according to a recent poll (11).



**"This leaves up to 1.1 billion fish farmed in the EU each year"**

Carp left outside water on sorting ramps for extended periods of time, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

# Carp farming in the EU

The common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) is one of the most farmed fish species worldwide, with annual production exceeding 4 million tonnes and involving up to 8.1 billion individual fish (12). Carp farming is particularly prominent in Asia, but it also plays a key role in Europe, ranking as the fourth most farmed fish in the EU with around 63,865 tonnes produced each year and up to 64 million individual fish (7). Production is concentrated in Poland (17,697 tonnes in 2023) and Czech Republic (15,903 tonnes in 2023), together accounting for more than half of EU tonnage output (13,14). With an average market size of around 2–3 kg (15,16), this would mean that between 5.3 and 7.9 million carp are farmed each year in the Czech Republic.

In the Czech Republic, carp represents about 85% of aquaculture production. Yet only 11.6% of fish produced in Czech aquaculture were processed in slaughterhouses in 2023, with the largest share intended for live sale on the

domestic market (33–36%) or for export (45–49%) (17).

The sale of live carp to the public mostly takes place in the weeks before Christmas. Fish are displayed in tanks at temporary street stalls where customers can choose whether they want the carp slaughtered on-site or take them home alive. While most carp are slaughtered directly at these stalls, some are bought alive, taken home and killed by untrained members of the public. This heavy reliance on live carp sales, combined with the absence of enforceable, species-specific welfare standards, exposes carp to significant and repeated welfare risks throughout the whole production cycle. To document these practices and their impact on fish welfare, CIWF conducted an undercover investigation at three Czech carp farms, recording the welfare issues they experience at all stages, from collection at the ponds right through to their live sale in street markets.



Carp confined in a small part of a storage pool using metal grids before being weighed and loaded onto transport trucks, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

# Investigation Findings

## Welfare conditions in Czech carp farming and retail



Carp tightly packed in lifting nets, taken out from outdoor ponds to be placed onto sorting ramps, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

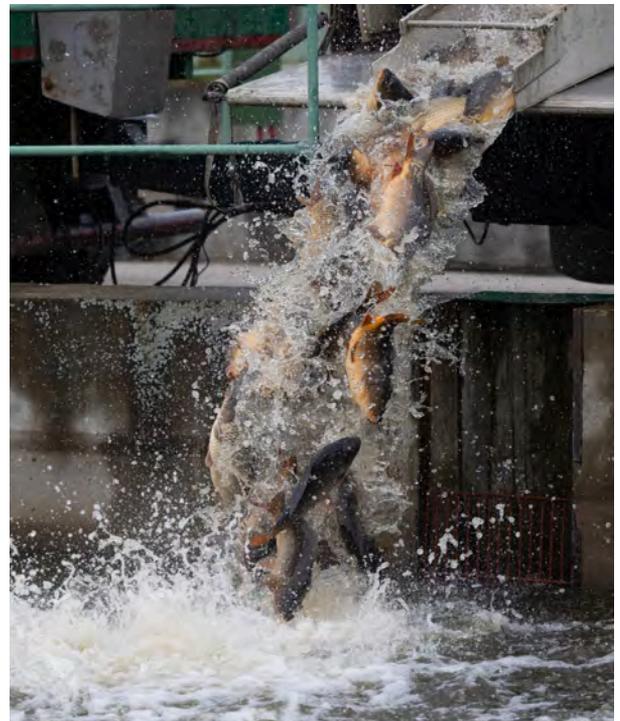


Workers handling carp on sorting ramps, where fish are exposed to air for long periods of time, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

Between October and December 2024, an undercover investigation was carried out at three carp farms in the Czech Republic.

Each farm was visited between one and three times during this period, collecting over 1,500 videos and photos over six different days.

In Czechia, most carp are farmed in outdoor ponds, in environments fairly similar to those they would experience in the wild (16). Our investigation therefore focuses on the following stages of the process: fish collection from ponds, the sorting of fish, transport, fasting in holding tanks, slaughter and the sale of live carp.



Carp being unloaded from transport trucks into storage pools, where they will remain unfed for up to a month, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.



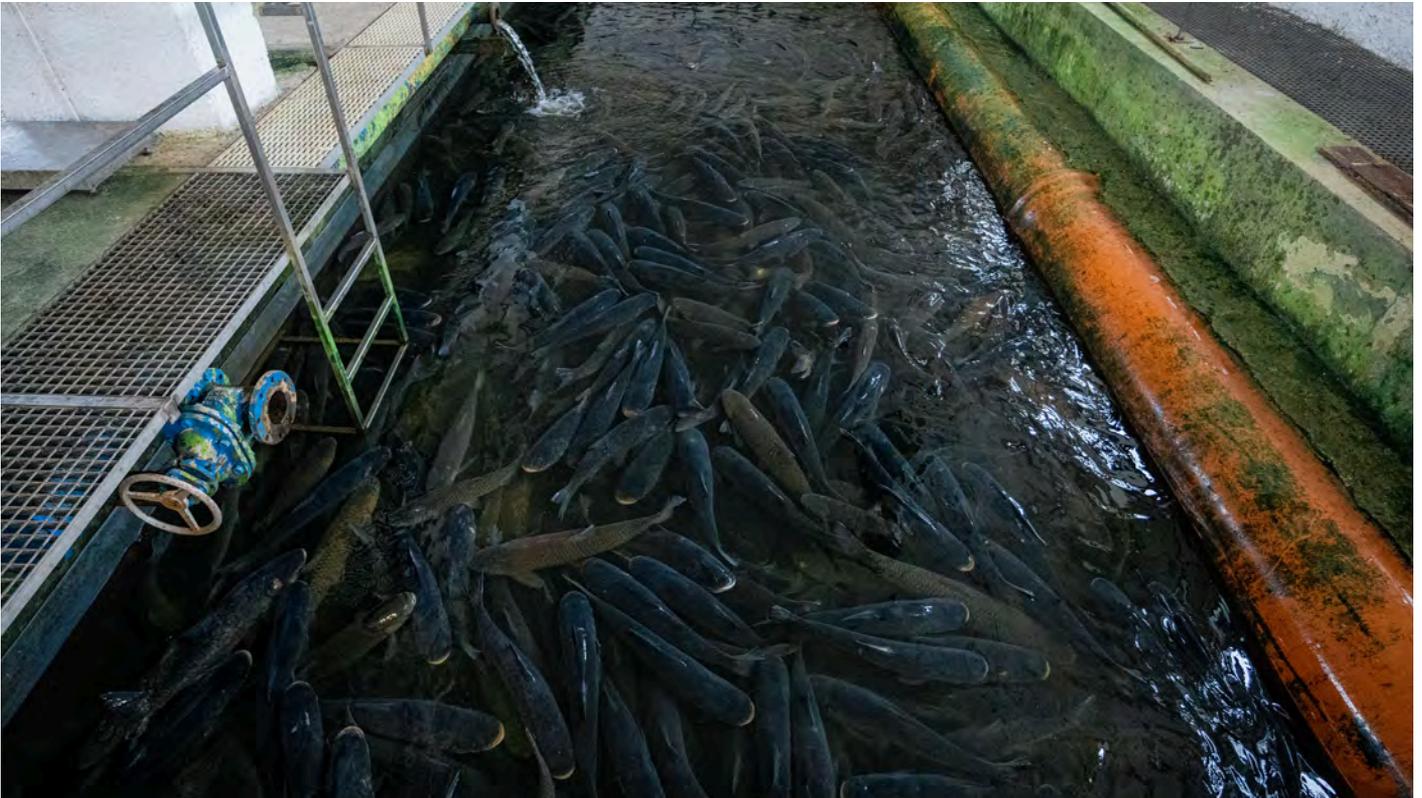
Live carp are sold directly to customers who transport them outside of water in plastic bags, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

Our investigation team first documented the drainage of outdoor ponds performed to concentrate fish into a confined area, making their capture easier. Once water levels dropped, workers collected the fish using hand nets and lifting devices, moving them onto sorting ramps to be separated by species and size.

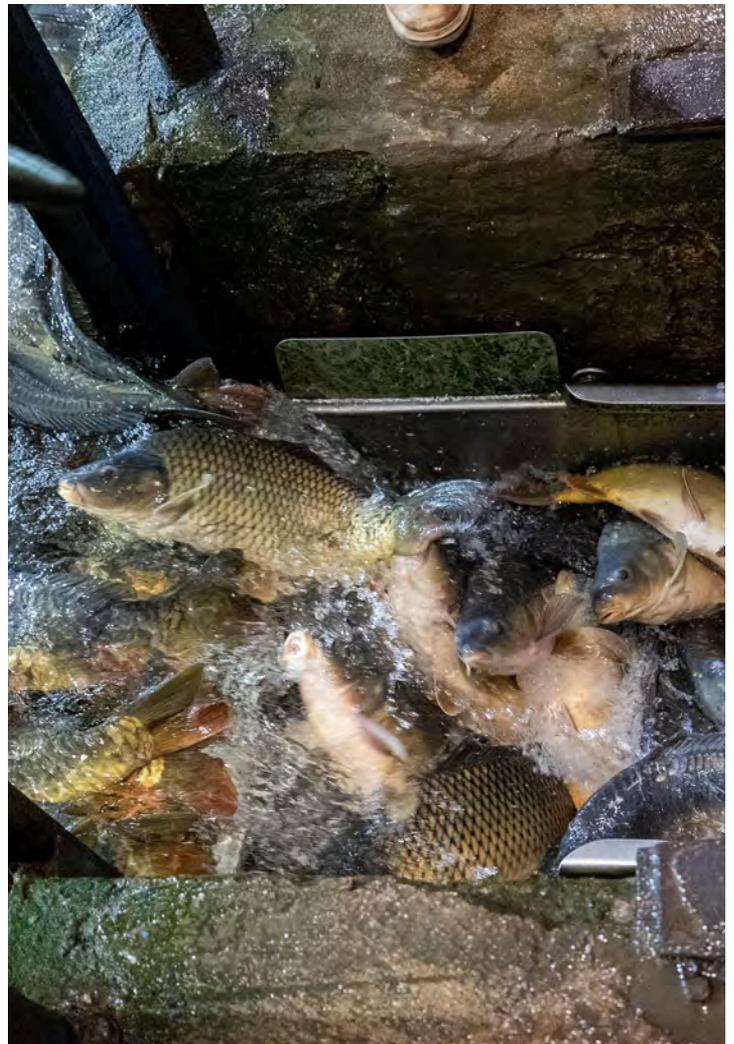
Some carp were selected to be sold directly to customers at the farm, while most of them were loaded into transport trucks and moved to storage tanks. There, fish were kept in storage tanks for several weeks in barren conditions without food. This fasting is done to improve flesh quality and remove certain 'flavours' that can develop in pond environments.



Carp are packed in transport containers. An oxygenation system is visible at the bottom, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

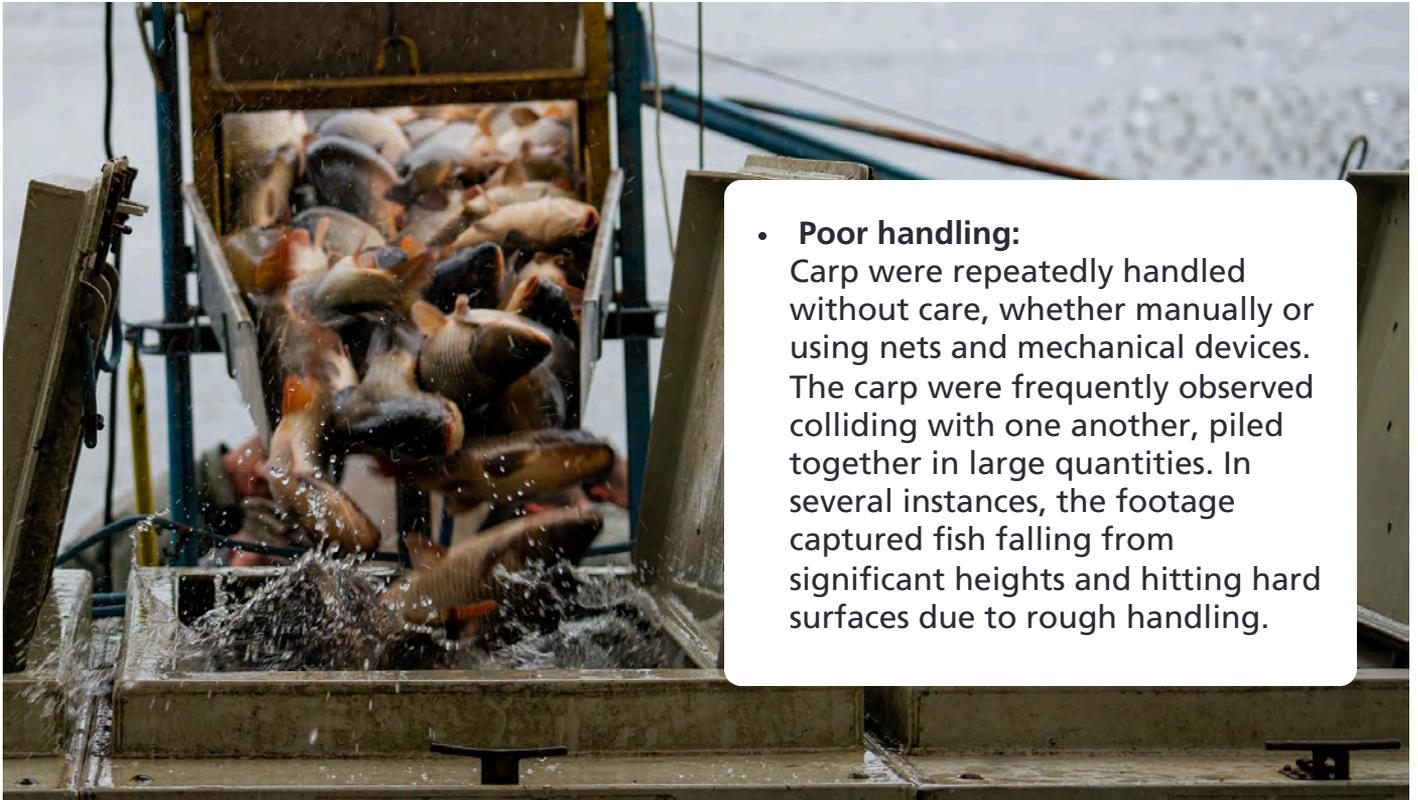


Indoor concrete pools where carp are transferred to before being weighed and prepared for transport, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.



A few weeks later, carp were transferred through underground tunnels to indoor concrete pools, where they were weighed and prepared for further transportation. Finally, the carp were loaded onto transport trucks and delivered to street stalls, where most carp were slaughtered and processed on-site and some were sold live to consumers to be slaughtered in their homes.

# Key welfare issues documented



- **Poor handling:** Carp were repeatedly handled without care, whether manually or using nets and mechanical devices. The carp were frequently observed colliding with one another, piled together in large quantities. In several instances, the footage captured fish falling from significant heights and hitting hard surfaces due to rough handling.

The loading of carp into transport containers using a mechanical device, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

- **Severe overcrowding and poor water quality:** Extremely high stocking densities were observed during several phases, including pond collection, netting, fasting tanks, and live transport. Overcrowding degrades water quality, reduces oxygen levels, increases waste, and heightens fish stress, disease risk, and injury (9,18). During the investigation when the carp were collected from the ponds, it was observed that many carp were struggling to breathe at the surface, with dozens of dead and dying fish floating nearby. Underwater footage from fasting tanks showed fish with visible wounds, fin damage, abrasions, and severe signs of infection.



Crowded carp in outdoor storage pools, where they are held without feed for up to a month, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

- **Prolonged air exposure:**  
Carp were routinely handled and moved without water, leading to extended air exposure. This practice was particularly evident during sorting, where individuals were kept out of water for extended periods of time - in some cases exceeding ten minutes - while separated by species or size. Similarly, fish were frequently moved between tanks using buckets or containers with low or no water, further increasing the risk of stress, gill damage, and suffocation.
- **Inadequate transport conditions:**  
During live transport, carp were confined at very high densities, sometimes without proper oxygenation systems. Loading and unloading were carried out carelessly, with fish dropped or piled on top of each other. Trucks transporting carp to street stalls, often stopped at multiple destinations to unload fish, making the journey longer than necessary and leaving fish cramped, struggling to breathe, and at high risk of injury or death.



Carp piled up in buckets without water after their collection from the ponds, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

- **Inhumane slaughter:**

For animals to be slaughtered humanely, they must be stunned (i.e. made unconscious, in <1 sec) before being killed to minimise pain and suffering (19). At street stalls, workers would strike carp on the head with different tools (e.g. wooden bat, hammer) in an attempt to percussively stun them. However, there were strong indications that this was often ineffective. Workers were hitting fish in different parts of the head, and in many cases carp showed signs of consciousness (e.g. they were still moving, reactive and breathing).

It was observed that the fish were then killed by cutting their throats, either with pruning shears or cutters. Carp who remained conscious were at a higher risk of experiencing pain and distress for several minutes while bleeding out (20). Slaughter methods used by customers at home are even less likely to be humane, as they would lack the appropriate knowledge and stunning equipment. These methods usually involve practices such as hitting them with household tools. Such practices carry a serious risk of prolonged animal suffering.



Carp with visible physical injuries is being weighed before being sold live, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

- **Sale of live carp to consumers and keeping them at home.**

Some customers were seen buying live fish and taking them home in plastic bags without water. Transporting fish in this way exposes them to severe stress, temperature shock and risk of asphyxiation (21,22), especially since the duration of transport is uncertain. Although carp are considered to be resilient animals when it comes to coping with a lack of oxygen,

this inhumane practice subjects them to extended periods of unnecessary suffering (20,23).

Furthermore, once at home, fish are often kept in unsuitable conditions, such as bathtubs, for several days without any welfare oversight by untrained individuals (24). This practice adds to the cumulative suffering these animals endure in farming environments, especially in the last phase of the production cycle.



Carp being weighed before being sold live, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published scientific reports on farmed carp welfare, identifying severe hazards such as fish gasping at the surface, reduced mobility due to crowding, miss-hits during percussive stunning, and slaughter procedures carried out while fish are still conscious, among many others (25,26). Our investigation documented all of these practices, clearly showing that EFSA's guidance is not being followed in practice. Similarly, the newly established European Union Reference Centre for the welfare of aquatic animals (EURCAW-Aqua) has also produced scientific resources and technical guidance identifying major welfare concerns, such as poor water quality, prolonged air exposure, ineffective stunning and lack of staff training (27,28). All of these issues were also clearly documented in our investigation, providing further evidence that current practices fail to comply with the scientific knowledge available.

**"The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has published scientific reports on farmed carp welfare, identifying severe hazards"**



Carp lifted out of the pond in crowded nets, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

# Legal Protection

- At the EU level, fish are recognised as sentient beings and are formally included within general legislation on rearing, transport and slaughter of animals for food. But beyond general principles, there are no rules specific to farmed fish and other farmed aquatic animals protecting them at any stage of their life. For example, in the EU Slaughter Regulation (29), the principle that animals shall be spared any avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing applies to fish, but they are excluded from specific requirements of this Regulation. As a result, their protection remains largely unenforceable, leaving significant gaps in welfare standards and allowing cruel farming practices to continue.
- In Czechia, fish welfare at slaughter is formally regulated by law under Act No. 246/1992 Coll. on the Protection of Animals Against Cruelty, which requires effective stunning, immediate bleeding and the use of equipment that ensures a quick and efficient process. In addition, as a member of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Czechia should follow international recommendations stating that fish must be transported in water under proper conditions. However, our footage revealed inconsistencies between recommendations, law and farming practices, especially during Christmas carp sales.



Carp weighed in a metal crate prior to being loaded onto transport trucks, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

# Policy recommendations

## At the EU level



Carp roughly handled by workers on sorting ramps, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

The European institutions are currently discussing the adoption of a new EU Regulation on the protection of animals during transport. The proposal published by the European Commission in 2023 would include specific requirements to protect fish and other aquatic animals. Compassion in World Farming supports this regulation and has issued recommendations for the welfare of aquatic animals in the revision of the EU Animal Transport Regulation ([Recommendations for the welfare of aquatic animals during transport in the EU](#)) (30).

Aside from the transport, it is also crucial that fish and other aquatic animals are included in the upcoming revision of the EU animal welfare legislation, with both general and species-specific requirements for the rearing and slaughter of aquatic animals. Such legislation should be based on updated scientific advice from the EFSA and from the EURCAW-Aqua.

# Policy recommendations

## In Czechia

CIWF advocates for the end of the sale of live carp to consumers. We believe live sales of carp cause unnecessary and prolonged suffering when they are transported live by consumers to their homes, kept in conditions (i.e. in bathtubs) which may further compromise their welfare. Finally, the humane slaughter of any animal including fish requires suitable training, expertise and the correct equipment to reduce or prevent suffering. Therefore, the practice of allowing consumers to slaughter carp without appropriate training and equipment is completely unacceptable from a welfare point of view and contradicts Czech legislation on slaughter. The sale of live fish to consumers should be banned as soon as possible by appropriate legislative measures.

Humane killing in slaughterhouses or at the farm would be the preferred method to ensure that the welfare of the animal is protected. But the low number of adequate slaughterhouses and the seasonality of carp consumption make it very difficult to implement in the short term. In the meantime, we believe that humane slaughtering at the point of sale can be an acceptable solution that would spare carp from several days of suffering, on the condition that it is performed by trained professionals with prior experience in humane handling and stunning carp.



Carp lying on sorting ramps without water, as workers separate fish by size and species, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

**"Finally, the humane slaughter of any animal including fish requires suitable training, expertise and the correct equipment to reduce or prevent suffering"**

# Conclusion:

**Overall, our investigation found significant animal welfare issues in Czech carp farming.**

Across sites, carp were repeatedly exposed to severe crowding, poor water quality, rough handling, prolonged air exposure and ineffective stunning, resulting in inhumane slaughter. These practices cause avoidable suffering and are inconsistent with the EU's treaty-level commitment to animal welfare (4). Indeed, most of the documented issues reflect hazards already identified by both the EFSA and the recently established EURCAW-Aqua as compromising carp welfare (25,26,27,28).

Unfortunately, such concerns are not unique to carp and are common across the numerous species and billions of fish farmed in the EU every year. We therefore urge stronger, enforceable, species-specific legal protections and standards to better safeguard fish welfare across EU aquaculture.



Carp in extremely overcrowded metal crates before being loaded onto transport trucks, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

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Suffocating carp on a sorting ramp, Czechia. CIWF, 2024.

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