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Press Release

Confused about fish labels? So are nearly two thirds of UK consumers

When shopping for higher welfare fish, many people turn to labelling schemes for guidance. Compassion in World Farming has investigated the welfare standards of these schemes and exposed a shocking truth: fish certified by these schemes suffer. Many live miserable lives in overcrowded tanks and cages. Others endure prolonged and painful deaths. Everyday, farmed and wild caught fish are reared and killed in cruel ways.

Today, leading farm animal welfare charity, Compassion in World Farming, launches its campaign targeting key global fish certification schemes. The labelling schemes that Compassion is demanding to introduce or improve on their welfare standards, are: The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC), Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP), Friend of the Sea (FOS) and GLOBALG.A.P.

These schemes tend to focus on the sustainability of fish stocks and the environment, which is important work. However, currently, some have no welfare protections in place at all. Practices that are allowed by some of these schemes include:

- Starving fish for up to 14 days, prior to slaughter
- Overcrowding fish into barren tanks or sea cages
- Inflicting a slow, painful death without adequate stunning
- Shooting wild seals and harming dolphins.

Following a poll carried out by Compassion and YouGov in May 2020, key findings include:

- Nearly two thirds (63%) of participants are not clear on whether the schemes protect fish welfare.
- More than 70% of participants find practices including farmers shooting wild animals, such as seals, to keep them out of their fish farms, starving fish unnecessarily and the long and painful slaughter of fish – whether wild or farmed, unacceptable.
- In line with the above, more than 70% of those questioned find it unacceptable that these well-known certification schemes allow these practices to occur.

- Almost 80%, (78%) of the participants think certification schemes should take steps to strengthen fish welfare standards or introduce them where they are not present in their requirements.

Compassion is calling for a host of welfare standards to be implemented or improved within these schemes. These include allowing the fish enough space to carry out their natural behaviours; reducing the number of days the fish are starved for, prior to slaughter; fast and painless slaughter methods and the prohibition of killing wildlife such as seals and dolphins.

Sophie Peutrill, Compassion's Fish Welfare Global Campaigns Manager says: *"These recent polling results are clear: UK consumers find it unacceptable for abhorrent practices, such as long and painful deaths for fish, to occur. So why is this still happening?"*

"Fish suffer immensely on factory farms and when caught in the wild. On factory farms—in tanks and in nets—they are crowded by the thousands. During slaughter they are often fully conscious as they thrash about, fighting for their lives. They are intelligent, emotional animals that can suffer and feel pain. In fact, fish are one of the most abused animals on earth. These certification schemes must improve their fish welfare standards, as a matter of urgency."

Fish are killed in the hundreds of billions per year globally for food production – even as many as trillions. To put this in perspective, 60 billion terrestrial (land) animals are farmed for food. In addition, fish farming is the fastest growing type of food production in the world, so we must act now to ensure that the welfare of fish is guaranteed.

Dr. Krzysztof Wojtas, Head of Fish Policy, says: *"All farmed animals deserve to live a life worth living. And yet, fish really are the forgotten trillions. Not only that, they are the least protected group of farm animals."*

"Like other animals, fish are emotional, complex beings. They can suffer; they can feel pain. Yet they suffer in silence. Without a voice of their own, they need us to speak up on their behalf."

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For more information please email media.team@ciwf.org or call 07400619293.

Images can be downloaded [here](#).

Compassion is urging the five largest fish certification schemes to [improve their welfare standards](#).

Notes to editors:

1. Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer who became horrified at the development of intensive factory farming. Today Compassion is the leading farm animal welfare organisation dedicated to ending factory farming and achieving humane and sustainable food. With headquarters in the UK, we have offices across Europe, in the US, China and South Africa.

To find out more about Compassion in World Farming visit: www.ciwf.org

2. Compassion's Rethink Fish Campaign aims to protect the world's fish. Compassion is calling on governments to introduce new legislation to ensure that fish are treated humanely during slaughter. Ultimately, to bring in new legislation and better business practices that protect fish throughout their lives. Compassion is working hard behind the scenes to help fish. In addition to public campaigning and raising awareness on the issue, the team is directly lobbying European governments and the EU Parliament itself to have new laws introduced to protect fish.

Country ranking in relation to how much participants valued fish welfare, from highest to lowest:

1. France
 2. UK & Netherlands
 3. Italy & Spain
 4. USA
3. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2137 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th - 6th May 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). All calculations produced by the Compassion in World Farming team.