Friend of the Sea Standard

FOS - Wild Welfare Standard for pole and line Fisheries



www.friendofthesea.org

REV	DATE	REASON	VALIDATION	APPROVAL
1	29/07/2025	Pilot Project	Paolo Bray	



Foreword

Friend of the Sea was established in 2008. Its objective is safeguarding the marine environment and its resources, encouraging a market, and implementing specific conservation projects.

The Friend of the Sea certification program allows for the assessment of fisheries and aquaculture products according to criteria and requirements. The certification, granted following an audit by independent certification bodies, ensures that a product complies with the requirements.

This standard shall be considered a pilot project with the purpose of checking the applicability and feasibility of the requirements in fisheries.

Requirements are classified as Essential or Recommended according to their level of importance.

Essential Requirements: The unit of certification shall be 100% compliant with essential requirements to be recommended for certification by the Certification Body (CB). Failure to comply with essential requirements is a major non-conformity. To achieve certification, corrective actions shall be implemented within three months from the date of assessment of non-conformities.

Recommended: It is not compulsory for the unit of certification to comply with recommendations to achieve certification. Nonetheless, compliance with recommendations shall be verified during the audit, and any non-conformities shall be highlighted in the audit report as a "recommendation". The unit of certification shall inform the CB, during the following audit, regarding any corrective measures implemented.

Requirements that are not applicable to the audited unit of certification will be marked with "N.A."

Carefish/catch project

The welfare of wild-caught fish has been overlooked in practice, research, advocacy, and policy. The Carefish/catch project (https://carefish.net/catch/) aims to promote better fishing standards by addressing 5 main goals:

1. assess global animal welfare impacts in fisheries,
2. identify the potential of reducing animal suffering in various fishing methods and species,
3. analyse the economic and social feasibility of the improvements suggested,
4. raise problem and solution awareness in general and specific audiences,
5. implement welfare guidelines into the Friend of the Sea fisheries certification scheme.

The international consortium responsible for this project is formed by:

- Fair-fish international,
- FishEthoGroup,
- Friend of the Sea,
- Centre of Marine Sciences (CCMAR),
- DeMoS Institute.

The funding is awarded through a grant from **Open Philanthropy**.

This project is an absolutely pioneering approach to a highly complex field, integrating both animal, social, economic, and policy perspectives, and the outcomes will impact the way we look into fisheries.

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is an emerging issue in aquaculture and fisheries, relating to ethics, animal health, and product quality. A growing number of researchers, decision-makers, and advocacy groups have been pushing for fish welfare to be thoroughly researched and integrated into the conversation about the future of seafood standards. In scientific and technical terms, welfare is defined as the state of the animal as it copes with its environment. The welfare of fish throughout the catching process can therefore be monitored.

Following these lines, the Carefish/catch project aims to promote better fishing standards by assessing animal welfare impacts in fisheries and improving fishing practices.

One important objective of the project is to identify key points of welfare hazards and suggest improvements to reduce the suffering of individuals in specific fishing methods. This would enable the establishment of welfare standards in the fisheries sector through a series of recommendations and guidelines to be implemented into the fisheries certification program Friend of the Sea.

Definitions and Abbreviations

(2) **Bycatch**: Part of a catch of a fishing unit taken incidentally in addition to the target species towards which fishing effort is directed. Some or all of it may be returned to the sea as discards, usually dead or dying.

(1) **Endangered** (threatened with extinction):
1 - Endangered Species is used as an Element within the GSSI Benchmark Tool and is explained below. The related term "Threatened" appears in the text of two Indicators as an example of bycatch species that are particularly vulnerable. The phrase "threatened…with serious risk of extinction" appears in the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries (paragraph 31.1).
2 - Endangered: Taxa in danger of extinction and whose survival is unlikely if causal factors continue operating. Included are taxa whose numbers have been drastically reduced to a critical level or whose habitats have been so drastically impaired that they are deemed to be in immediate danger of extinction. Also included are those that possibly are already extinct, in so far as they definitely have not been seen in the wild in the past 50 years.
3 - Threatened with extinction: A category of organisms listed in CITES Annex 1. The vulnerability of a species to threats of extinction depends on its population demographics, biological characteristics, such as body size, trophic level, life cycle, breeding structure or social structure requirements for successful reproduction, and vulnerability due to aggregating habits, natural fluctuations in population size (dimensions of time and magnitude), residency/migratory patterns. This makes it impossible to give numerical values for population size or area of distribution that are applicable to all taxa.
"Protected" refers generally to any plant or animal that a government declares by law to warrant protection; most protected species are considered either threatened or endangered. A species that is recognized by national legislation, affording it legal protection due to its population decline in the wild. The decline could be as a result of human or other causes.

(2) **Fishery:** A unit determined by an authority or other entity that is engaged in raising and/or harvesting fish. Typically, the unit is defined in terms of some or all of the following: people involved, species or type of fish, area of water or seabed, method of fishing, class of boats, and purpose of the activities.

Unit of Certification (UoC): a vessel, fleet, or individual operator using a certain gear type, fishing on a particular target stock that is undergoing audit.

References:
(1) GSSI Glossary https://www.ourgssi.org/assets/GSSI-Benchmarking-Tool/GSSI-Global-Benchmark-Tool-V.1-October-2015.pdf
(2) FAO Term Portal http://www.fao.org/faoterm/en/?defaultCollId=21

Pole and line Fisheries

Pole and line or bait boat makes use of a simple apparatus, a pole or a rod attached to a line comprised of a single barbless hook at the end and live bait. The fisheries target mostly fast-moving schools of large pelagic fish, e.g. tuna species such as *Thunnus obesus* (bigeye tuna), *Thunnus alalunga* (albacore tuna), *Thunnus albacares* (Yellowfin tuna) or *Katsuwonus pelamis* (Skipjack tuna), but also tuna-like and billfish species.
Owing to its high species selectivity and low bycatch relative to other important fisheries such as purse seines, trawls and nets, it is generally seen as a more sustainable fishery. Furthermore, it is an important source of employment, sustenance, and food security for communities in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, the Maldives, among others, but also with economic and cultural relevance in Japan, Hawaii (USA), the Canary Islands (Spain) and the Azores (Portugal).
The fishing process is rather straightforward and includes various technical and methodological specifications dependent on the fishing location and the species being targeted. Firstly, fishing involves searching for live bait fish, such as natural tuna prey item species (e.g. small pelagics). Once caught and crowded, fish are picked into specialised live bait holding tanks filled with seawater. The following steps comprise a search operation to detect and identify tuna schools. In artisanal vessels, this is a time-consuming stage which might take around 70 to 80 per cent of the full fishing process. In more modern vessels, the use of SONARs to track fish and estimate school size considerably reduces this effort. Schools are often detected by seabird presence or surface foaming effect, usually around natural fishing aggregating devices (FADs) such as floating pieces of wood or around artificial fixed and drifting fads, the most advanced with communication and schools detecting systems.
Once a school of a sufficient size is detected, the vessel quickly intercepts the front of the shoal, and the main fishing operation begins from the aft, the starboard, or the port side of the vessel, or in combination from all three sides. This next fishing stage begins with the process of throwing the live bait fish, where a single or multiple fishers scoop out the bait fish into the sea near the vessels to attract the target fish, a process that continues throughout the fishing operation. Parallel to this, a process called spraying, which involves splashing water around the vessels either manually, using wooden logs, or mechanically, using water pumps, is commonly carried out, and the gear, sometimes attached to a lure that resembles one of the baitfish species, is dipped into the water. The tuna gets hooked if it inadvertently bites the hook instead of the baitfish and is instantly jerked out of the water onto the vessels using a swing action. However, other forms of retrieval, such as gaffing and manual dehooking, are also observed in certain fisheries.
Finally, on-board handling can range from leaving the hooked tuna on the vessel's deck until they are landed, to having a hydraulic conveyor belt that carries individual tunas into and under-deck storage chambers. Most vessels featured a ramped floor for landing tunas into a storage chamber, which freezes the animals at low temperatures using ice, ice slurry, or refrigerated seawater, with some equipped for blast freezing at -20°C to -40°C.

Reference: *Carefish report – Welfare assessment in Pole and line fisheries.*
https://esszett.cloud/s/ArQRtFPYj9erj9j

Description of the unit of certification

This document shall only be filled out by personnel of the CB in charge of the audit.
It shall be filled out in English, if spoken fluently.

a) NAME OF THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION TO BE AUDITED:
b) NAME OF THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION REQUESTING THE AUDIT:
c) IS THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION TO BE AUDITED PART OF A GROUP? IF SO, PLEASE SPECIFY THE NAME OF THE GROUP AND LIST ALL MEMBERS:
d) ADDRESS OF THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION TO BE AUDITED:
e) NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS OF THE PERSON AT THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE AUDIT AND CONTACTS WITH THE AUDITOR:

f) FLEET TO BE AUDITED:

Name of the fishing vessel	Registration number	Vessel's flag	Fishing method	Capacity (MT)	Unloading harbour	Ship owner, if different from “a)”

g) VESSELS AUDITED ON SITE (the auditor shall l list the vessels which have actually been audited on site as a sample representing the fleet)**:**

Name of the fishing vessel	Registration number	Unloading harbour

h) FISHING ZONE *(Coordinates and/or FAO area and/or subarea and/or ICES area and/or EEZ. If available, please include a map.)***:**

i) COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAME OF THE SPECIES TO BE AUDITED, WITH THE RESPECTIVE FISHING METHODS:

Common Name	Scientific Name	Fishing method
		Pole and line
		Pole and line
		Pole and line
		Pole and line

j) TOTAL NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:

k) ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATIONS AND AWARDS:

I) ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
Please specify the type of audit (initial, surveillance, additional, unannounced or recertification). In the case of multi-site audits, please specify also the method for calculation of sites inspected.

☐ **The Carefish/catch project was introduced** *(If not, the auditor should provide a short description).*

☐ **The unit of certification and the ship owners were informed of the opportunity, in case of approval, of using the Friend of the Sea logo on the certified products.**

☐ **The unit of certification has a document qualifying and confirming the roles of the staff carrying out the audit.**

☐ **The duration of the audit was agreed upon.**

☐ **The information included in the Preliminary Information Form (PIF) was confirmed** (in the case of changes to the PIF, an updated version has to be promptly provided).

<table>
<tr><td>CERTIFICATION BODY:</td><td>AUDIT TEAM:</td><td>AUDIT START AND END DATE:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">SIGNATURE OF AUDITOR:</td><td rowspan="2">NAME OF THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF THE UNIT OF CERTIFICATION AND ACCOMPANYING THE AUDITOR DURING THE AUDIT:</td><td>AUDIT CODE:</td></tr>
<tr><td>TYPE OF AUDIT:</td></tr>
</table>

NOTES TO THE AUDITOR

1) The auditor shall fill out all fields in the checklist.

2) The Auditor shall provide an explanation when requirements are not applicable.

3) The Auditor shall write YES when the unit of certification complies with a requirement and NO when it does not.

4) The Auditor shall comment and explain the positive or negative answers. Simple "YES," "NO," or "N.A." are insufficient.

5) Each relevant document shall be added to the final audit report in a separate and numbered attachment.

6) Photographic evidence added to the checklist or attached is appreciated.

7) The application process is NOT discriminatory on size, scale, management, minimum number of operators and number of vessels involved.

1 – CAPTURE

No.	Requirement	Level	Parameters and information	Y/N/ N.A.	Comments
1.1	Reduce operation time as much as possible.	Recommended	Operation time: The full duration of a pole and line operation might differ depending on several aspects, e.g., target species, fishing area, etc. The reduction of such a period would reduce the risk of pain, injuries, exhaustion or death by depredation, suffocation, exhaustion, physical injuries (e.g., mouth and internal injuries, bleeding wounds) or psychological impact due to restraining stress during dehooking, which should be done manually instead of jerking it out.		
1.2	When possible, instead of gaffing, the UoC shall use scoops to collect catches.	Recommended	Gaffing leads to severe cuts and bruises on the fish's body, causing profuse bleeding, and its use should be reduced as much as possible. Use of large diameter and highly resistant scoops net to bring fish on board should be an alternative to the use of gaff hooks.		

1.3	The vessel's deck should be padded with soft material to avoid injuries to fish. This soft material should be kept moist during all the fishing operations.	Recommended	The UoC should implement measures to reduce damage from impact with the boat deck during the hauling on board phase (e.g. use of soft, moist, cloth-like panels)		
1.4	When fishing for live bait, the UoC shall implement all applicable welfare measures.	Recommended	The UoC, while fishing for live bait for pole and line fishing activities, shall implement the welfare measures applicable to the fishing method used in such activity.		
1.5	The UoC shall use barbless hooks.	Recommended	Barbless hooks are fishing hooks designed without a barb—the small, backwards-facing projection typically found on conventional hooks. Their smooth design allows the hook to penetrate the fish's mouth easily but also to be removed quickly and with minimal tissue damage. Using barbless hooks significantly reduces physical injury and stress in fish during capture and handling. The absence of a barb minimises tearing of the mouth and surrounding tissues, shortens handling time, and facilitates a quicker release if non-target or undersized individuals are caught. This		

			contributes to a lower post-release mortality and improves overall animal welfare within the fishing operation. From a sustainability perspective, barbless hooks support more responsible fishing practices by decreasing unnecessary harm to marine organisms and enhancing the survival rates of released fish. They also simplify compliance with selective fishing and bycatch reduction programs. Adoption of barbless hooks aligns with Friend of the Sea's principles of environmental stewardship and ethical treatment of marine life.		

2 – ONBOARD HANDLING

No.	Requirement	Level	Parameters and information	Y/N/N.A.	Comments
2.1	The UoC shall create and apply a codified procedure for handling catches, which shall take into account the welfare of target catches.	Essential	There shall be a written procedure that takes into account what is addressed in the following requirements. All the staff involved in fishing operations shall undergo training on the procedure. Appropriate refresh courses shall be organised by the UoC annually and for all new employees. A designated and identifiable person in charge of training and monitoring shall be appointed.		
2.2	Ensure efficient handling methods to minimise stress and injuries to the catch during dehooking.	Essential	The UoC shall implement procedures to ensure that the handling and the dehooking are conducted with as little stress and damage as possible. The UoC shall invest in training and awareness to increase the fishers' skills.		
2.3	Minimise air exposure.	Essential	The removal of catches from their natural environment and their prolonged air exposure can produce stress and pain in catches. The UoC shall reduce to the minimum as much as possible the		

			capture's air exposure from the time when catches are hauled on board until they are dead. The use of a ramp or a conveyor belt to reduce the time fish spend on deck is recommended.		

3 - STUNNING AND SLAUGHTER

No.	Requirement	Level	Parameters and information	Y/N/ N.A.	Comments
3.1	A codified procedure for stunning and slaughtering, focused on fish welfare, must be in place, with a designated supervisor and trainer.	Essential	The procedure shall take into consideration the target species, type, and dimension of the vessel. The procedure shall include refreshing courses for all crew directly involved in fishing operations. General recommendations to decrease pain or suffering are to stun and slaughter animals as soon as possible when they arrive on board.		
3.2	Use of appropriate and effective stunning and slaughtering tools by trained staff.	Essential	Stunning and slaughtering tools should be effective to ensure rendering fish unconscious and to ensure a quick demise of the target species (e.g. use of Ikejime, fishing priest, or captive bolt pistol).		
3.3	The UoC shall put catches in ice slurry, refrigerated seawater or blast dry freezers only after stunning to ensure swift hypothermia. Directly slaughtering by severing the aorta while unconscious could be an alternative.	Recommended	The UoC must act as quickly as possible in stunning and freezing the fish.		

4 – BY-CATCH

No.	Requirement	Level	Parameters and information	Y/N/ N.A.	Comments
4.1	There shall be a written procedure to manage appropriately the welfare of bycatch species.	Essential	This procedure shall address the sorting and release to ensure		

			minimal stress and damage to bycatch species.		
4.2	The UoC subjects its employees to a course, taught by experts, on how to manage the release of accidental catches.	Recommended	The course must include general notions on the potential bycatch present in that marine area.		
4.3	The unit of certification does not use Fishing Aggregating Devices (FADs) or uses non-entangling FADs, Biodegradable FADs, Smart FADs, and reduce the time the FAD remains at sea.	Recommended	1. Non-entangling FADs Structures are designed to prevent accidental entanglement of species such as sharks and turtles. They use rigid materials or no suspended nets. Reduces the risk of suffocation or injury to animals circling the FAD. 2. Biodegradable FADs Made from natural materials (palm leaves, jute ropes, bamboo) to prevent marine pollution from plastic and microplastics. Less harmful to the environment if lost. 3. Smart FADs with sensors or cameras They use echosounders or cameras to monitor which species are aggregating. They help prevent the net from being lowered when too many non-target species (e.g., sharks or dolphins) are present. 4. Minimum soaking time: Reducing the time the FAD remains at sea decreases the likelihood of attracting species other than the target tuna.		
4.4	The unit of certification is in contact with	Essential	This requirement		

	rescue centres or other competent entities specialised in the care of sea turtles and/or other species, on which it relies if there is a need to treat one or more injured animals. The crew must be instructed on how to manage these emergencies.		covers: Sea turtles, marine mammals (cetaceans or seals), and seabirds.		
4.5	The unit of certification informs the Port Authority and the nearest rescue centre in case of accidental catches.	Essential	This requirement covers: Sea turtles, marine mammals (cetaceans or seals), and seabirds.		

5 – TRAINING

No.	Requirement	Level	Parameters and information	Y/N/ N.A.	Comments
5.1	UoC staff involved in fishing operations must undergo fish welfare training conducted by experts.	Essential	Evidence of conformity.		
5.2	The UoC must train one of its staff members as a fish welfare expert.	Essential	The person chosen to become a fish welfare expert must complete the course required in requirement 5.1 and will be the point of reference for all fish welfare activities in their company.		

Further comments:

CONCLUSIONS:

The Auditor shall fill out the following fields:

☐ **The unit of certification COMPLIES with Friend of the Sea Fish Welfare requirements.**

☐ **The unit of certification DOES NOT COMPLY with Friend of the Sea Fish Welfare requirements.**

MAJOR NON-CONFORMITIES (to be corrected within 3 months)

List major non-conformities.

RECOMMENDATIONS (to be communicated within the next inspection)

List recommendations