Friend of the Sea Audit Guidance

FOS – Audit Guidance on the Wild Welfare Standard for longline fisheries

www.friendofthesea.org

REV	DATE	REASON	VALIDATION	APPROVAL
1	03/06/2025	Provide guidance to the checklist	Paolo Bray	

Foreword

Friend of the Sea has been 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

Longline Fisheries

Longline is a common fishing method used in small-scale and industrial fisheries worldwide using lines with multiple hooks that can extend for several kilometres. As a highly selective gear, longlines are species-specific by nature and target high-value fish

like tuna and swordfish, performing with relatively reduced bycatch rates, accounting for much less of global fish catch when compared with trawling or purse seine, partly since they achieve less catch per landing than those methods. Longlining can be used to target both pelagic (e.g., tuna, billfish) and demersal (e.g., sharks, flatfishes, sparids) fish species, with lines being rigged and set at a position or left drifting in the water column depending on the target species.
A longline is a type of hook-and-line gear where hooks are connected to several branch lines (also called leader, snood, or gangion) which are then attached to a long horizontal mainline at certain intervals.
Hooks and branch lines can be attached to the mainline through conventional knots by mechanical crimps or clamps, which often incorporate swivels. Longlines are usually baited manually or by a machine and set in open water for a certain period (usually from one change of tide up to a full day) and may be hauled by hand or by powered reels or drums.
The number of hooks and the length of the mainline depend on the scale of the operation and the area of fishing grounds, ranging from a few hundred meters in artisanal coastal set longlines to more than 80 km in large-scale drift (pelagic) longlines, as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
Set demersal longline fishing is a widely used static method that targets various bottom-dwelling species around the world.
The mainline can rest on the seabed or float slightly above it, with an anchor or weight to keep it in place and a buoy line for marking and retrieval. This fishing gear allows for efficient catching of a variety of fish species like the Atlantic cod, halibut, swordfish, groupers, conger eels, sparids, and Patagonian toothfish, amongst others. Drifting longlines are a popular fishing method for targeting pelagic species like billfish and tuna as they drift passively in the water column with the current. The ability to adjust fishing depth based on conditions and target specific species makes them an effective tool for offshore fishing. Branch lines in drifting longlines can be lengthy, and the movement of the boat being attached to one end of the longline allows for fishing in various depths and locations where pelagic species are abundant. The factors influencing the depth of hooks in longline fishing, including the length of line between floats, float line, branch line, and mainline catenary, play a crucial role in determining catch rates and species composition.
There are however concerns about the impact of longline fisheries on non-target PET (Protected, Endangered and Threatened) species, such as elasmobranchs, seabirds or marine turtles (and sometimes even cetaceans), as well as the overall health of marine ecosystems.
Proper management and regulations are crucial to ensure the sustainability of longline fisheries and minimise their environmental impact. Mitigation measures for reducing the catch of PET species in longline fisheries include bird-scaring lines (tori lines), weighted snoods, hook pods and night setting, the setting depth, use of electro-sensory methods or even changes in the type and colour of bait, and the type and size of the hooks (e.g. the use of circle hooks to avoid catching turtles).

Reference: *Carefish report – Welfare assessment in Longline fisheries.*
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1 – CAPTURE

Requirement		Level
1.1	**Reduce operation time as much as possible.**	**Recommended**

Operation time: The full duration of a long line operation might differ depending on several aspects: e.g., target species, fishing area or depth but usually the event lasts between one change of tide and a full day, which are then the minimum and maximum time fish may be struggling in the hook upon capture. The reduction of such 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 hooking.

The auditor shall verify that the UoC reduces the time gear remains in water and the time needed to recover gear and collect catches.

Requirement		Level
1.2	**The longline is rigged in such a way as to reduce the bycatch as much as possible.**	**Recommended**

As permitted by applicable laws and regulations, consider using barbless hooks, circle hooks, and changing hook size to reduce the use of live bait, reducing the mainline length or lead line spacing, or even the depth of operation.

The auditor shall check applicable laws and regulations and report them. The auditor shall also attach evidence of the methods and equipment used by UoC.

Requirement		Level
1.3	**During the hauling stage, implement measures to reduce damage and stress as much as possible.**	**Recommended**

To reduce the possibility of injuries, together with exhaustion and decompression injuries, reduce hauling speed and the capture ascent rates or reduce the use of gaff hooks.

The auditor shall report all relevant data and information (recovery speed, depth) and collect photos of the catches so that any damage indicators present can be assessed in relation to the speed of recovery and depth.

2 – ONBOARD HANDLING

Requirement		Level
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 has to considers what is addressed in the requirements of this section 2 – Onboard Handling.
All the staff involved in fishing operations shall undergo training on the procedure.
Appropriate refresher 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.
The auditor shall report in the checklist:

- If a procedure exists.
- When the last course has been done or when it is scheduled.
- Who is the designated person in charge, by stating the name and role in the company.

The auditor shall attach the procedure and relevant documents to the audit report.

Requirement		Level
2.2	**Ensure efficient and gentle handling methods to minimise stress and injuries to the catch during dehooking.**	**Essential**

The UoC shall implement procedures to ensure that the onboard collection and dehooking are conducted with as little stress and damage as possible.
The UoC shall invest in training and awareness to increase the fishers' skills.
The auditor shall verify that training material is updated, fit for purpose and aligned with this requirement, and through an on-board visit that the UoC is compliant.

Requirement		Level
2.3	**Minimise air exposure.**	**Essential**

The removal of catches from their natural environment and their prolonged air exposure can produce stress and pain to catches, the UoC shall reduce to the minimum, as much as possible, the air exposure from the time when catches are hauled on board until they are dead.
The auditor shall gather information and data on it and verify the onboard procedure.

Requirement		Level
2.4	**Minimise the time of sorting activities.**	**Essential**

The sorting activity shall be conducted after getting the individuals on board as quickly as possible and leading to slaughter as quickly as possible.
Leaving the catches on deck, entrapped in the fishing gear, or thrown shall be avoided.
Appropriate catch boxes, in kind and number, shall be used.
The auditor shall review the procedure and interview the crew to assess compliance with this requirement, and through an on-board visit that the UoC is compliant.

3 - STUNNING AND SLAUGHTER

Requirement		Level
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 refresher 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.
All the staff involved in fishing operations shall undergo training on the procedure.
Appropriate refresher 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.
The auditor shall report in the checklist:

- If a procedure exists.
- When the last course has been done or when it is scheduled.
- Who is the designated person in charge, by stating the name and role in the company.

The auditor shall attach the procedure and relevant documents to the audit report.

Requirement		Level
3.2	**Use of appropriate and effective stunning tools by trained staff.**	**Essential**

Stunning tools should be effective to ensure rendering fish unconscious or to ensure a quick demise of the target species. The auditor shall verify the presence of the appropriate tools and that these tools undergo regular maintenance.
Tools shall be safely stored when not in use.
The auditor shall attach to the report pictures of these tools.

Requirement		Level
3.3	**The UoC doesn't use ice as a stunning method, although it should be used if no stunning or slaughter methods are available.**	**Recommended**

The use of ice can only be considered in cases where alternative methods cannot be made available. Use adequate amounts of ice and water in the boxes where fish are stored.
The auditor shall evaluate, based on the type of operation and fishing vessels of the UoC, if the use of ice is justified and provide evidence of good practices of the UoC in using it.

4 – BY-CATCH

Requirement		Level
4.1	**There shall be a written procedure to manage appropriately the welfare of all by-caught species.**	**Essential**

This procedure shall address the sorting and release of all the individuals alive and in good condition and ensure minimal stress and damage to by-catch species during the release procedure.
The auditor shall read and assess the procedure to ensure its efficiency.
It is requested to attach the procedure to the audit report.

Requirement		Level
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.
The auditor is requested to gather information on:

- Who is handling the course.
- The frequency of the course.
- Attendance.
- Verify the modality and the training material.

Requirement		Level
4.3	**The unit of certification uses some mitigation procedures in fishing activities during periods of high presence of air-breathing megafauna (cetaceans, seabirds, and sea turtles). Examples of mitigation techniques should be in line with scientific studies performed in the area of operation.**	**Recommended**

The auditor shall report the peak of air-breathing megafauna presence and list the megafauna species. The auditor shall assess which techniques are appropriate concerning the area and the megafauna present (e.g. crew observers to alert for the presence of cetaceans in the vicinity of the vessel before net setting, UV lights, pingers, etc.). A practical example shall be attached as evidence of conformity.

Requirement		Level
4.4	**The unit of certification is in contact with 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.**	**Essential**

This requirement covers sea turtles, marine mammals (cetaceans or seals), and sea birds.
The auditor shall report with which rescue centre or competent entity the UoC is in contact.
The auditor shall also verify the presence and quality of instructions given to the crew.
Note: The rescue centre or the competent entity shall provide appropriate instructions to the crew.

Requirement	Level

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 sea birds.
The auditor shall verify that the UoC has the right contacts at the Port Authority and the nearest rescue centre.

5 – TRAINING

Requirement		Level
5.1	**UoC staff involved in fishing operations must undergo fish welfare training conducted by experts.**	**Essential**

The auditor shall collect evidence of the training course held by experts (e.g. Fair Fish, FishEthoGroup) for all of its employees involved in fishing operations.

Requirement		Level
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.
The auditor shall indicate the person and collect evidence of training conformity.