Friend of the Sea Audit Guidance

FOS – Audit Guidance on the Wild Welfare Standard for Pots and Traps Fisheries

www.friendofthesea.org

REV	DATE	REASON	VALIDATION	APPROVAL
1	23/01/2024	Provide guidance to the checklist	Paolo Bray	
2	29/10/2026	Alignment with the revised checklist: decapod requirements, new section 5 – On land, training renumbered to 6	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."

Care fish/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

Pots and traps Fisheries

Pots and traps (hereafter named traps for streamlining reasons) are fishing gears commonly used in both small-scale and industrial fisheries around the world. While they account for a relatively small proportion of global fish landings, certain target species can bring in significant revenue for the sector, as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Trap enclosures or devices typically have rigid structures and employ bait or the appearance of refuge to lure fish, crustaceans, or molluscs inside, from which escape is difficult. Most traps are deployed on the seabed or riverbed, targeting primarily benthic species at depths ranging from a few meters to 700 meters, and a haul-in line is used to check and rebait the traps.

Compared to other demersal fishing gears like bottom trawling, most traps have a lesser impact on the habitat, although there is still evidence of seabed impact during trap fishing operations, especially on rocky bottoms. Benthic habitats can be interfered with or even destroyed when the main and secondary fines are hauled aboard, or when lost traps continue to catch fish (known as ghost fishing). Although there are legal limits on the number of traps that can be owned and deployed, the fact that traps can remain underwater for several days makes it challenging to monitor these fisheries and enforce regulations.

Although non-target species are usually successfully removed from traps, there is still a by-catch associated with this fishery, which can nevertheless cause (relatively low) mortality depending on factors such as depth and soaking times. By-catch of Protected, Endangered, or Threatened (PET) species is also reported, with turtles becoming entangled in vertical lines and both vertical and ground lines causing entanglement of marine mammals, resulting in permanent injuries or death. Currently, there is a debate regarding the implementation of mitigation methods, such as using culling rings to allow undersized animals to escape, sinking ground lines instead of floating ones between traps, reducing the number of buoy lines, or using ropeless gears with associated recovery/hauling technology.

Reference: *Carefish report – Welfare assessment in pots and traps fisheries.* *https://esszett.cloud/apps/files/files?dir=/PROJECT_CAREFISHCATCH/Workpackage_2_welfare_reports&openfile=1135179*

1 – CAPTURE

	Requirement	Level
1.1	**Reduce soaking time as much as possible**	**Recommended**

Soaking time: Soaking time is the length of time that the fishing gear remains in the water, between setting and hauling.

ref. https://www.bmis-bycatch.org/mitigation-techniques/soak-duration

The Unit of Certification (UoC) shall reduce soaking time to decrease the risk of pain, injuries or death by depredation, suffocation, exhaustion, physical injuries (e.g., scale loss, cuts, bleeding wounds), or psychological impact due to restraining stress during net entangling.

The auditor shall find out how long the soaking time lasts by interviewing the crew and find out if there is a margin to reduce the soaking time as much as possible. If there is space to reduce it, the UoC shall do it, and the auditor is requested to verify it.

	Requirement	Level
1.2	**Hauling speed shall be reduced as much as practically possible.**	**Recommended**

Hauling speed: it is the speed at which the fishing gear is hauled (i.e., pulled on board).

The UoC shall reduce the speed with which the pots and traps are hauled on board to minimize the capture ascent rates and barotrauma.

The auditor shall assess the catches to verify the presence of barotrauma. If present, the auditor shall recommend that the UoC reduce the speed to a speed that avoids barotrauma.

	Requirement	Level
1.3	**The traps should have an opening wide enough to remove the animal without damaging it.**	**Essential**

The opening shall be wide enough to ensure the safe removal of the catches, reducing the possibility of injuries (such as cuts, loss of scales, etc.)

The auditor shall verify the main target species and verify the dimensions of the opening accordingly.

Photo evidence of traps shall be attached to the checklist.

Requirement		Level
1.4	**The twine that closes the traps must be biodegradable.**	**Recommended**

This requirement is intended to ensure that, if the fishing gear is lost, it loses its effectiveness in catching animals after a certain period of time.

The auditor shall verify it and attach photos to the checklist.

2 – ONBOARD HANDLING

Requirement		Level
2.1	**The UoC shall create and apply a codified procedure for hauling and handling catches.**	**Essential**

There shall be a written procedure that has to take into account 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 organized by the UoC annually and for all new employees.
A designated and clearly 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 was 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	**Handling time and method.**	**Essential**

The UoC shall handle catches appropriately to reduce damage and stress to them.

The appropriate way is intended as calm, wet gloves, handling with 2 hands, avoiding the use of excessive force when removing fish from nets, avoiding throwing on deck and kicking of fish and decapods; do not walk or stand on decapods, or drop them from height.

The auditor shall verify the presence of appropriate handling tools and review and attach to the report a video of the operation.

Note: *For privacy reasons, the video shall be considered confidential and cannot be made publicly available*.

Requirement		Level
2.3	**Air exposure.**	**Essential**

The removal of catches from their natural environment and their prolonged air exposure can produce stress and pain to catches, so, the UoC shall reduce to the minimum as much as possible capture's air exposure from the time when catches are hauled on board and when are dead.

The auditor shall gather information and data on it, and verify the on-board procedure.

Requirement		Level
2.4	**Sorting activities.**	**Essential**

The sorting activity shall be conducted after hauling as quickly as possible. Leaving the catches on deck, entrapped in the fishing gear, or thrown shall be avoided. Appropriate catch boxes, in kind, number, and state of maintenance shall be used.

The auditor shall gather information and data on it and verify the on-board procedure.

Requirement		Level
2.5	**Avoid the use of excessive strength when removing catches from the fishing gear.**	**Essential**

It is requested to reduce, as much as possible, the strength used by the fishermen to extract the catches from the gear (e.g. avoid pulling fishes from gills, octopuses from tentacles, decapods by limbs, etc.)

The auditor shall verify through an interview with the crew the procedures used during this operation.

	Requirement	Level
2.6	**Avoid the use of bleach and other chemicals.**	**Essential**

This practice can cause unnecessary damage and suffering to octopuses and fish in general whenever applicable. We recommend using alternative methods, mentioned below in the standard.

The auditor shall assess the method used by the UoC.

	Requirement	Level
2.7	**The UoC ensures the negative effect of the capture method on the target species and decapods, and the risk of bycatch is minimised through the use of adapted equipment, fishing and handling practices during and immediately after capture.**	**Recommended**

Actions used to reduce the negative effects of capture methods should include: avoiding exposure to shifts in barometric pressure, salinity and temperature; avoiding physical trauma, injury and exhaustion; adjusting mesh sizes and pot designs to enable escape for bycatch, and for target species in the event of lost pots; and increasing the frequency at which pots are checked.

The auditor shall verify, through interviews with the crew and observation of the gear and of fishing operations, which of these measures are in place, and report them in the checklist. Photo evidence of the gear (e.g., escape openings, mesh size) should be attached to the checklist.

	Requirement	Level
2.8	**The UoC does not permit the removal of claws from any live decapod crustacean.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Essential**

Declawing is the practice of manually removing one or both claws from live crabs or other decapod crustaceans. It causes trauma, stress and pain to the animals. Declawed animals returned to the sea show increased morbidity and mortality, as they are less able to feed, defend themselves or compete for resources.

The auditor shall verify that declawing is prohibited in the written procedure required by requirement 2.1, interview the crew and, where possible, inspect a sample of the catch on board or at landing, taking into account that decapods may also lose claws naturally.

	Requirement	Level
2.9	**The UoC does not permit the immobilisation of claws by 'nicking' (cutting of claw tendons) or any other injury.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Essential**

Claw nicking involves fracturing the apodemes and cutting the tendons in the dactyls of the claws to prevent them from functioning. The resulting wounds are painful and can lead to blood loss, infection, and death. Nicking also prevents natural behaviour, as claws are essential for the natural movement and activity of these animals.

The auditor shall verify that nicking and any other injury to the claws are prohibited in the written procedure required by requirement 2.1, interview the crew on how claws are handled, and inspect a sample of live decapods for cuts or other injuries to the claws.

	Requirement	Level
2.10	**Other environmental stressors – Avoid exposing decapods to light, avoidable noise/vibration, extreme/fluctuating temperatures, unfavourable weather conditions, social stress, risk of crushing/injury.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Recommended**

Appropriate holding conditions should be provided that are specific to each species' needs. The same conditions specified for sorting, holding and transport should be observed when decapods are landed at the quayside.

The auditor shall verify the holding conditions on board and at the quayside (e.g., protection from light, sun and weather, temperature, separation of animals, filling of containers) and report them in the checklist.

	Requirement	Level
2.11	**The UoC shall develop an Emergency Action Plan for the holding and transport of decapods.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Essential**

An alternative plan should be created and made available to the crew to be used in the event of an emergency, such as a vessel breakdown, delaying the landing of live animals.

The auditor shall verify that the Emergency Action Plan exists, is available on board and is known to the crew, and shall attach it to the audit report.

3 - STUNNING AND SLAUGHTER

Requirement		Level
3.1	**A codified procedure for stunning and slaughtering must be in place, with a designated supervisor and trainer.**	**Essential**

In the case of Octopus fisheries, the recommended practice is stunning by making an incision with a sharp, pointed object (e.g., a knife) into the brain. This procedure should be encouraged and ideally performed while the octopuses are still inside the traps or immediately after their removal from the traps.

Stunning methods in net fishing shall include percussion by using a sharp blow to the head, destroying the central nervous system and rendering the fish unconscious immediately and irreversibly; or electricity by providing an electrical shock either in water or in contact with two electrodes while emerging, rendering the fish unconscious, yet reversibly. While different vessels and sizes of operations may vary widely, manua percussive stunning seems to be more adequate for set net fishing than electrical stunning, which requires additional manpower and equipment.
All the staff involved in fishing operations shall undergo training on the procedure.
Appropriate refresher courses shall be organized by the UoC annually and for all new employees.
A designated and clearly 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 was 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**

A sharp blow to the head delivered by a trained member of the crew should be effective and fast to render the catch unconscious. This method may be used with a fishing priest or with a captive bolt pistol.
In the case of octopus fisheries, an incision with a sharp, pointed object (e.g., a knife) into the brain shall be

used. Electrical stunning equipment and appropriate slaughter equipment (e.g., sharp knives) should be provided for the slaughter of decapods on board vessels, along with the required training.

The auditor shall verify the presence of the appropriate tools and verify that these tools undergo regular maintenance.
Tools shall be safely stored when not used.

The auditor shall attach to the report pictures of these tools, and report the name of trained staff in charge of this procedure.

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

Requirement		Level
3.4	**Conscious decapods should not be slaughtered using any of these methods: boiling or other thermal cooking, chilling, wet/ice chilling (for temperate species), asphyxiation, chemical anaesthetics, CO_2 gassing, tailing, or other forms of dismemberment.**	**Recommended**

Effective stunning followed by immediate slaughter, with insensibility enduring until death occurs, is the only humane way to kill decapods. Current scientific evidence supports electrical stunning as best practice when appropriate species-specific parameters are applied. Mechanical killing by double spiking (crabs) or full-body splitting (lobsters) should be carried out by trained, skilled professionals only.

The auditor shall verify, through the procedure required by requirement 3.1, interviews with the crew and observation of the slaughter, that none of the listed methods is used on conscious decapods, and report the stunning and slaughter methods applied.

Requirement		Level
3.5	**The UoC shall develop and make available to vessel crew an Emergency Action Plan for the humane slaughter of decapods in the event of electrical stunning being temporarily unavailable.**	**Essential**

Alternative procedures should be made available to ensure that no decapods suffer inhumane deaths. This plan should be for emergencies only.

The auditor shall verify that the plan exists, is available on board and is known to the crew, and shall attach it to the audit report. Where the UoC does not target decapods, the requirement shall be marked N.A.

4 – BY-CATCH

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

This procedure shall address the sorting and release of all 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 unit of certification subjects its employees to a course taught by experts on how to manage the release of accidental catches.**	**Essential**

The course must include general notions on the potential bycatch present in that marine area.
The auditor is requested to gather info on:

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

5 – ON LAND

	Requirement	Level
5.1	**The UoC shall provide appropriate species-specific transport conditions for live decapods for as long as they remain in the UoC's custody.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Essential**

This requirement applies only after landing and concerns exclusively companies that transport fishery products.

The auditor shall verify the transport conditions provided to live decapods (e.g., containers, temperature and humidity, filling of containers, duration of transport) and the related records and report them in the checklist. If the UoC does not transport fishery products, the requirement shall be marked N.A.

	Requirement	Level
5.2	**Live sales to the public.** **Only applicable to fisheries targeting decapod species.**	**Essential**

The UoC shall have a clear policy banning the sale of live decapods directly to members of the public at quayside or at any other time. With the requirement for electrical stunning as best practice and specialist training for manual dispatch, it is not possible for slaughter to be achieved in domestic kitchens. The UoC should acknowledge its duty of care to live decapods by not selling them to non-commercial buyers.

Fisheries could have 12 months of transition time to achieve compliance with this requirement.

The auditor shall verify that the policy exists and is applied, e.g., by reviewing sales records and interviewing staff, and shall attach the policy to the audit report. Where the transition period is used, the auditor shall report its start date and the expected date of compliance.

6 – TRAINING

	Requirement	Level
6.1	**UoC staff involved in fishing operations must undergo fish / decapod 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
6.2	**The UoC must train one of its staff members as a fish / decapod welfare expert.**	**Essential**

The person chosen to become a fish / decapod welfare expert must complete the course required in requirement 6.1 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.