

SEAT and the Benefit of Ethics

Work Package 8

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UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING



Cefas



Framing key values within a broader ethical framework

Values and goals, not moral judgements

- Clarifying how aquaculture production and trade can fit in with global values and goals, such as poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.
- Not passing moral judgements on aquaculture or parts thereof, neither positively nor negatively.
- Based on research, systematic social science methods will be used to provide high quality research on the ethical issue.

Benefits of broad ethical considerations

- Clarification of values underlying social and economic practices.
- Include value perceptions from various stakeholders and affected parties.
- Not to leave the floor to the media alone, but to contribute with transparent information on all value aspects of aquatic food.
- Not only focusing on the worries, but just as much also on the positive effects along the value chain.
- We believe that the results of SEAT potentially will benefit all stakeholders along the aquaculture value chain, from producers all the way to the consumers.

Why ethics is important for trade

- We believe that a growing sector of consumers in the rich importing countries is looking for food products that are acceptable in regard to how it is produced, how it affects the environment and how it contributes to the producers' livelihood.
- Consumers are making food choices that they see as part of their vision of a good, just and sustainable society.
- They see food as an arena for political action ("political consumerism") and are "voting with the fork".

Values and goals, not moral judgements

The SEAT project is a comprehensive research activity covering the whole value chain of aquaculture production and trade. One of the main outputs is an Ethical Aquatic Food Index (EAFI). This has a lot to do with clarifying how aquaculture production and trade can fit in with global values and goals, such as poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. It has not in any way to do with passing moral judgements on aquaculture or parts thereof, neither positively nor negatively.

While many actors readily accept the need for standards, certifications schemes and the like, many will question what ethics might be about and the need for it.

Questions asked might include:

- What do ethics actually mean?
- Does including ethics imply that something is morally wrong with aquaculture?
- Is the inclusion of ethics opening up for all kinds of merely subjective viewpoints?
- Is it possible to talk about general and global ethical standards or principles?

SEAT is based on research, and systematic social science methods will be used to provide high quality research on the ethical issue. One of the basic research assumptions is that aquaculture production and trade is embedded in web of social values in the sense of both affecting these values and being affected by them. These might be values of fairness, equity, well being and sustainability. The further assumption of the project is that these values matter vitally in regard to the consumer acceptability of seafood products, as they eventually also may matter to governmentally imposed standards or certifications of trade.

Benefits of broad ethical considerations

We see ethics as a clarification of values underlying social and economic practices. For this clarification it is necessary to include value perceptions from various stakeholders and affected parties. For example, some forms of shrimp cultures have contributed greatly to creating workplaces in poor communities, especially perhaps among women who otherwise had small chances of income. This value is not often visible from the consumer end. On the other hand, some forms of production practices have proven a great burden on the environment by threatening biodiversity generally and degrading mangroves specifically. Such concerns are often highlighted in critical press coverage, but not always detailed and specified. In respect to aquaculture one has seen a lot of consumer scepticism arising from partially misleading media coverage.

The idea of an EAFI is not to leave the floor to the media alone, but to contribute with transparent information on all value aspects of aquatic food. We shall chart all concerns by not only focusing on the worries, but just as much also on the positive effects along the value chain. By this we believe that the results of SEAT potentially will benefit all stakeholders along the aquaculture value chain, from producers all the way to the consumers.

Why ethics is important for trade

We believe that a growing sector of consumers in the rich importing countries, especially the EU, is looking for products that are not only safe to eat, but also acceptable in regard to how it is produced, how it affects the environment and how it contributes to the producers' livelihood. This is what some researchers have coined the growing "political consumerism". The understanding of this is that consumers are not merely following food habits and preferences, but are making food choices that they see as part of their vision of a good, just and sustainable society. One may say that they see food as an arena for political action and are "voting with the fork".