

**State/Federal Aquatic Health Partnership Meeting
December 12-13, 2006
Las Vegas, NV**

Day One

Introduction and welcome by Dr. Jere Dick, USDA-APHIS, including APHIS authorities and interests in the development of a national aquatic animal health plan (NAAHP).

Follow-up welcome by Mr. Stuart Leon, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, including FWS authorities and interests in the development of the NAAHP.

Follow-up and welcome by Mr. E. Spencer Garrett, NOAA-Fisheries, including NOAA authorities and interests in the development of the NAAHP.

The task force introduced themselves and was followed by introductions of the meeting participants.

Kevin Amos provided an overview of the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture (JSA).

Dr. Jere Dick provided a presentation on the NAAHP, its purpose, development and timelines.

Question and Answer Session:

Several States asked about Federal pre-emption and State rights. States expressed that they would want the ability to have more stringent regulations than Federal regulations if they have the science-based justification to do so.

The Task Force responded that States can be more stringent if they have justification to do so. The NAAHP is a road map of model programs that eventually could become codified into programs and regulations. The NAAHP could also serve as a template for States who have no aquatic animal health regulations. Additionally, the NAAHP would focus on diseases of national importance, recognizing there are many local and regional issues. The NAAHP could be a minimum set of standards.

Chronic Wasting Disease regulation was mentioned as a regulation where the Federal regulation pre-empts any State regulation, and dissatisfaction with this type of regulation was expressed.

One representative expressed a desire for Federal requirements that state that all State requirements (health or otherwise) be met prior to any health certificate being issued by the Federal government.

The Task Force agreed to review the pre-emption issue.

One representative mentioned the National Poultry Improvement Program (NPIP) as a model for developing resolutions, having a voting mechanism and establishing an advisory committee. NPIP can propose to modify regulations, promulgate new regulations, revise or eliminate existing regulations.

One representative mentioned that there is a void in many rules and regulations to address tropical/ornamental/aquarium and baitfish.

The Task Force was asked if invasive species would be addressed in the NAAHP. The Task Force responded that this is beyond the scope of the NAAHP with the exception of where an exotic pathogen is viewed as an invasive species. There are other forums that address invasive species.

One representative mentioned the need for import guidelines in light of a specific issue regarding viable white spot syndrome virus (WSSV) in frozen products.

Afternoon Presentations:

Presentation: Key Elements (Rob Bakal)
Used analogy of NAAHP to a car.

Q: How are you going to make this happen? (toothless program)
NAAHP is guidance document, especially for States without plans, not a regulatory document. It is a baseline document to gain buy in with stakeholders, on what is important on a national perspective.

What programs going to implement and where? Disease specific programs such as certification programs, disease control programs. Example of SVCV, considered a foreign animal disease, had eradication program. All disease specific program documents will be developed under a regulation during rule making, after the Plan is complete. The Plan is a blueprint, or road map.

Testing methodologies for surveillance will also be a part of the Plan including lab training, testing and reagents. Not just a Plan about regulations. Are labs consistent, have professional accreditations, have quality assurance today? There are still very basic needs.

Industry wants reliable diagnostic services that are meaningful and accurate. From a scientific consideration the Plan is a set of general principles and of guidelines for applying the principles. It should be a universal reference document.

Q: Will it be like the USDA Animal ID Program? Started out mandatory and now would take a crisis to become mandatory. But at least now have the formula to follow. Not sure who would be in charge, but would have an idea on where to go.

Q: Would the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) serve a function with aquatic animals, as reference lab, for confirmatory tests?

Yes, they would be involved. USGS laboratories also have expertise, at least one is an OIE reference lab. For quality assurance and reagent development, NVSL can't wait until funding. They have already been building on their aquatic animal capabilities. There may also be other labs that could be involved.

Q: (comment): For those working currently in the fish health field, there are labs out there. A good network exists including FWS labs. May not be APHIS approved, but can count on them. Needs are more of certification of protocols, standardization, and consistency than of problems with individual labs. For example, what if you are from a different country, and want to import an aquatic animal? What type of competent authority does the US have? How might you look at it during an audit, and looking at how the US runs a national program. Other countries can audit the U.S. How can we show that our results can be trusted?

Ex:) VHS in Great Lakes. What cell line will it grow on? Different labs have different susceptibility of lines. EPCs and CHSEs from ATCC do work, are sensitive.

Q: Funding mechanism?

Ongoing. The National Aquaculture Association (NAA) – goes to congress for funding for the NAAHP program. The NAAHP is like a wish list to start with, and then we will have to come up with real needs. Implementation can be misleading. This is where partnerships with states come in.

AFWA Perspective: (John Kerwin for Larry Peck)

NAAHP gives protection for farmed and natural resources, it acts as a safety net. States maintain their rights in this Plan. WA State has its own formal plan. It is also a living document which is able to change. Pacific Northwest Fish Health Protection Committee is also a regional model for a fish health plan. A major benefit is that it develops partnerships in local, regional and national sectors, but also includes federal, states, tribes and industry. Suggestion was made to take the Plan to WAFWA next, during the third week in July. Seek support regionally then to AFWA in the fall.

Q: What is the process with in AFWA? Should the Plan go to executives, or committees? Larry Peck, as AFWA liaison to the NAAHTF, is still open to suggestions, and has not decided on a process. Eric Schwab, with the Fish and Water Resources Committee, is the liaison to APHIS. AFWA may be looking to Larry Peck to provide updates. Possibly the committee is not getting enough NAAHP information. The Health committee of AFWA is not looking at the NAAHP at this point. The next Fish Administration meeting is next spring. Suggestion made to brief the fish chiefs there, before WAFWA. Is the NAAHP team aware of the National Fish and Wildlife Initiative? Yes, APHIS is now a member of AFWA as well. At first AFWA only wanted to inform the federal agencies of the initiative. Now they will allow us to engage in it. Gary Whelan is the only fish health person the AFWA committee. There is overlap of language with this initiative and the NAAHP.

USAHA Perspective: (James Foppoli)

USAHA is a national organization with an executive board and directors. There are allied organizations, private industry involved and federal agencies as allied agencies, primarily due to avian influenza. USAHA has a good website. There are 30-35 allied organizations. General assembly convenes all the members and committees. One committee is devoted to aquatic animals and holds a session during the annual meeting. Next one will be in Reno, in October of '07. A committee report is written and resolutions may be made. The resolutions are usually sent to APHIS for response. Last year's resolutions included one for funding of the NAAHP. There are 40-45 resolutions overall from the annual meeting. A written response is usually received in 6 months from APHIS. There are also 4 regional meetings: east, south, west and central. There will be a request soon for a NAAHP presentation at the next west meeting.

Dr. Jere Dick as Associate Deputy Administrator of APHIS usually responds for APHIS on the resolutions during the first week of February. He will also represent APHIS at the USAHA west meeting in March. APHIS would like to be more proactive with fish health but only receives less than \$200,000 per year for the aquatic animal health program. Requests are made for funding, but have no choice if there are cuts from Congress. To move the Plan into reality, it would need to have significant support by industry, states, and their legislatures. Right now can only respond to emergencies, and government workers cannot lobby congress themselves. FWS also has the same constraints with budgets. We need support to meet aquatic animal health needs ahead of time rather than be reactionary. NOAA also has the same problems with funding programs.

FWS would like the opportunity to respond to USAHA resolutions but did not receive the resolution concerning the NAAHP from USAHA. It is too early for USAHA to send out the requests. It is the USAHA executive committee that decides which agencies the resolutions are sent to. Usually are sent by email, at the secretary level, then are filtered down within agencies.

Inter and Intra-State Partnerships and Teams (Kevin Amos)

Funding for fish health programs are decreasing over time in proportion to the rest of the funding for most States. This is why we need to partner, because lack of funds and aquatic health is not a high priority for most states. We have shared watersheds, overlapping resources (wild and cultured), and need to partner as in the case of emergency diseases.

Homework assignment:

How can we better work together as teams? Be thinking about institutional barriers or practical barriers to communications that we have now and how to overcome them.

Day Two

Question and Answer session moderated by E. Spencer Garrett.

Issues:

Trust/Distrust – need time to develop relationships (State-Federal)
Turf
Money
Complacency (some States/individuals don't care about aquatic animal health)
Priorities/Priority Assignments
Complexity
Lack of Protocol/Information Sources
Approach to issues
Different Goals (Agriculture vs. Natural Resources)
Education of various State authorities
 -Don't know who the competent authority is
 -Don't know what the fish issues are
Education of private industry, NGOs, general public
Work Load
What initiated the NAAHP – unclear
Who are all the players?

Jill Rolland provided example of ISA, SVC and VHS to exemplify why a NAAHP is needed.

The group reasserted the need to hear what the NAAHP is going to do for them – benefits.

Priority Issues:

Trust/Distrust
Who are the players?
Money – program development, implementation, travel, research, monitoring, surveillance, etc.
Public sentiment
Why do we need a NAAHP and what's in it for us?

Benefits:

1. Need a rapid response time for emergencies (have a plan)
2. Standardized lab procedures, reagents, QA/QC, etc.
3. NAAHP represents general principles and guidelines for application of science-based contingency plans
4. Provides a mechanism for rapid response
5. Provides for a plan to demonstrate to Congress a well thought out plan to address aquatic animal health issues to seek increased funding
6. Provides a vehicle to prohibit unfit animals to enter individual states

Impediment – resistance to change!

One participant reiterated the need to require States to issue an import permit before a Federal permit is issued and recognize State plans that are already in place.

We cannot develop State-State and State-Federal partnerships until impediments are identified and addressed.

Lack of trust is an issue that affects all organizations.

Other benefits of the NAAHP:

Provide guidance on how long an inspection and health certificate is valid. This can be highly varied in State regulations. Also, could provide recommendations for lot vs. facility inspections.

One participant expressed that lab standards/reagents and guiding principles and guidelines as well as contingency plans are the most important benefits of a NAAHP.

Establish an index of labs, certifications, point people, etc.

The NAAHP must recognize State animal health requirements – don't tell States to get rid of their requirements. States don't want to be forced to accept fish if they don't meet the State requirements.

We need to define standardization more clearly to include interpretation and how to deal with positives.

Model programs for all fish/disease issues could take much time, but would also serve to minimize the trust and turf issues.

One participant expressed the need to codify the plan. Add a new section in the CFR and seek input from USAHA.

One participant expressed that these potential benefits are just that – potential. The group does not necessarily agree to the NAAHP or that it will be beneficial. There remain multiple issues and some potential benefits.

Needs have been identified but no potential follow-through.

A plan and putting a plan on the ground are two different things.

The NPIP model was mentioned by Jill Rolland and by one participant very familiar with the NPIP.

One participant mentioned that private industry and natural resources don't always see the same needs.

Another participant mentioned how you could have a natural resource group in an NPIP model. For example, avian influenza is included in wild birds in NPIP – the NPIP can adapt when needed.

Robert Bakal summarized his thoughts on benefits:

- good model for States that have no aquatic animal health regulations
- good standardized lab protocols
- training
- certification
- QA/QC
- Continuing education
- Protocols for communication in a crisis
- Map for dealing with emergencies and emerging issues
- Documentation to support funding for aquatic animal health issues
- Increased ability to export and find new markets
- Level of protection from imported diseases.

Evaluations were filled out by participants. In general, most participants felt they understood the mission of the Aquatic Animal Health Task Force and why a national plan is being developed. There was medium to strong support for implementing a national aquatic animal health plan, although some participants expressed they could not support the national plan before they had more information and have a better understanding of the plan and how it might impact their State. Many participants felt they could have better participated had they received background information prior to the meeting. Most participants responded that the focus of the meeting moved away from building partnerships and towards better understanding the mission of the Task Force and the national aquatic animal health plan.

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