

CHAPTER 5.2.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Article 5.2.1.

Protection of the professional integrity of the certifying official

Certification should be based on the highest possible ethical standards, the most important of which is that the professional integrity of the *certifying official* should be respected and safeguarded.

It is essential to include in the certificate only those specific statements that can be accurately and honestly signed by a *certifying official*. For example, these requirements should not include certification of an area as being free from *diseases* that are not notifiable in that country, or the occurrence of which the signing *certifying official* is not necessarily informed about. It is unacceptable to ask for certification for events that will take place after the document is signed when these events are not under the direct control and supervision of the signing *certifying official*.

Article 5.2.2.

Certifying officials

Certifying officials should:

- 1) be authorised by the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country* to sign *international aquatic animal health certificates*;
- 2) only certify matters that are within their own knowledge at the time of signing the certificate, or that have been separately attested by another **competent** party authorised by the *Competent Authority*;
- 3) sign only at the appropriate time certificates that have been completed fully and correctly; where a certificate is signed on the basis of supporting documentation, the *certifying official* should have verified or be in possession of that documentation before signing;
- 4) have no conflict of interest in the commercial aspects of the *aquatic animals* or *aquatic animal products* being certified and be independent from the commercial parties.

Article 5.2.3.

Preparation of international aquatic animal health certificates

Certificates should be drawn up in accordance with the following principles:

- 1) Certificates should be designed so as to minimise the potential for fraud including use of a unique identification number, or other appropriate means to ensure security. Paper certificates should bear the signature of the *certifying official* and the official identifier (stamp) of the issuing *Competent Authority*. Each page of a multiple page certificate should bear the unique certificate number and a number indicating the number of the page out of the total number of pages. Electronic certification procedures should include equivalent safeguards.
- 2) Certificates should be written using terms that are simple, unambiguous and as easy to understand as possible, without losing their legal meaning.
- 3) If so required, certificates should be written in the language of the *importing country*. In such circumstances, they should also be written in a language understood by the *certifying official*.

- 4) Certificates should require appropriate identification of *aquatic animals* and *aquatic animal products* except where this is impractical (e.g. eyed eggs).
- 5) Certificates should not require a *certifying official* to certify matters that are outside his/her knowledge or that he/she cannot ascertain and verify.
- 6) Where appropriate, when presented to the *certifying official*, certificates should be accompanied by notes of guidance indicating the extent of enquiries, tests or examinations expected to be carried out before the certificate is signed.
- 7) The text of a certificate should not be amended except by deletions that should be signed and stamped by the *certifying official*.
- 8) The signature and stamp should be in a colour different to that of the printing of the certificate. The stamp may be embossed instead of being a different colour.
- 9) Only original certificates should be accepted by the *importing country*.
- 10) Replacement certificates may be issued by a *Competent Authority* to replace original certificates that have been, for example, lost, damaged, contain errors, or where the original information is no longer correct. These replacements should be provided by the issuing authority and be clearly marked to indicate that they are replacing the original certificate. A replacement certificate should reference the number and the issue date of the certificate that it supersedes. The superseded certificate should be cancelled and where possible, returned to the issuing authority.

Article 5.2.4.

Electronic certification

- 1) Certification may be provided by electronic exchange of data documentation sent directly from the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country* to the *Competent Authority* of the *importing country*.
 - a) Systems providing electronic certificates normally provide an interface with the commercial organisation marketing the commodity for provision of information to the certifying authority. The certifying official should have access to all necessary information such as origin of aquatic animals and laboratory results.
 - b) When exchanging electronic certificates and in order to fully utilise electronic data exchange the *Competent Authorities* should use internationally standardised language, message structure and exchange protocols. Guidance for electronic certification in standardised World Wide Web Consortium (WC3) Extensible Markup Language (XML schemas) as well as secure exchange mechanisms between *Competent Authorities* is provided by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT).
 - c) A secure method of electronic data exchange should be ensured by digital authentication of the certificates, encryption, non-repudiation mechanisms, controlled and audited access and firewalls.
- 2) Electronic certificates should carry the same information as conventional certificates.
- 3) The *Competent Authority* should have in place systems for the security of electronic certificates against access by unauthorised persons or organisations.
- 4) The *certifying official* should be officially responsible for the secure use of his/her electronic signature.