

CASE STUDY

Pilot Programme: Sinergia Animal

PARTNER ORGANISATION: SINERGIA ANIMAL

Sinergia Animal is an international animal advocacy organisation that works to improve the welfare of animals through corporate outreach, undercover investigations, and campaigns for reductions in meat consumption. They currently operate in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Sinergia Animal were selected as one of the first organisations to collaborate with Animal Ask in our pilot programme in December 2020. For our pilot programme, we were looking for organisations to work with that were considering an up-and-coming ask. Sinergia Animal were looking to advocate for fish welfare in South East Asia and identified themselves as a good pilot participant due to their desire for additional research in forming their first fish ask.

Sinergia Animal's requirements were relatively broad, stating that they required support with the formation of a fish welfare ask for a corporate campaign aimed at either the retail sector or at producers directly. The ask needed to work for two target countries (not disclosed at present due to ongoing tactic planning) and we had a timeline of six months to complete the research. The focus of the campaign was to achieve the greatest possible positive impact for fish.

SCOPING

In order to have the greatest impact for fish overall, and due to the many differences in the requirements of different species, we selected target species to focus our research on. The species were selected based on data which indicated the number of different fish farmed in the target countries.

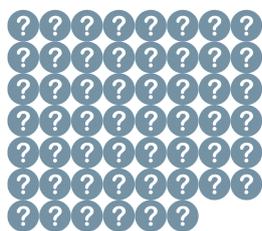
Based on the production numbers and the brief to impact the most fish lives, we decided to focus our research on **Nile tilapia, Clarias catfishes, Pangasius catfishes,**

milkfish, and common carp. We recognise that some of these terms encompass multiple specific species (e.g. ‘Pangasius catfishes’ includes *Pangasius bocourti*, *Pangasius hypophthalmus* etc.). Where relevant, indicated which specific species was investigated in the studies.

There are other fish species, such as silver barb, which are farmed in large numbers in the target countries. We focused on just five species during our research as these cover the majority of farmed fish in both countries and reviewing the evidence for each ask for every farmed species would take significant resources. Depending on specific details, a fish welfare ask in our target countries could also be appropriate for other species outside of the five we focused on.

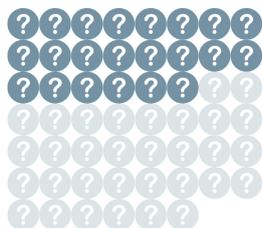
RESEARCH ROUNDS

The initial list of potential asks contained 54 different asks.



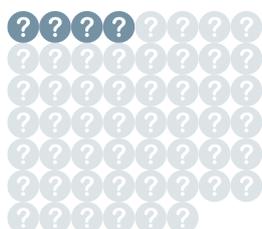
SHALLOW

In round one we examined each ask using our four methodologies; weighted factor model, expert view, cost effectiveness analysis and informed consideration.



GREATER DEPTH

Following the systematic rankings obtained from the research, we eliminated 32 ideas. In round two we examined the remaining 22 asks in greater depth using the same four methodologies as round one.



EXTENSIVE REPORTS

Based on the outcomes of this analysis, we identified four priority asks to write extensive reports on: stocking density, water quality, slaughter, and management practices.

Some of these were highlighted as potential foundations for an ask while others, namely management practices, were examined as a possible addition to a composite ask. The full list of ideas and reasoning for elimination at each stage is available by request.

In our final extensive reports we found strong arguments for improving elements of water quality and stocking density and mildly promising arguments for management practices at a later stage, as well as a slaughter ask once more data is available for the target species. Each ask could potentially be very impactful. However, which one looks better in expectation depends on how you weigh the evidence or likelihood of certain outcomes. Below is a summary of the conclusions from our four extensive reports.

Our conclusion is best summarised based on the uncertainties or judgement calls that would lead you to favour one ask or the other, as described in the following summaries.

Access to the full extensive reports will be made public following Sinergia Animal's campaign launch in this area. Due to the sensitivity of the planning phase we are unable to share any further information at this time. If you have specific questions about any of the interventions we have researched, please get in touch with Animal Ask and we would be happy to advise you further regarding our findings.

STOCKING DENSITY

Stocking density is an important factor in fish welfare. High stocking densities can contribute to stress, disease, poor water quality, and mortality. Unfortunately, there is limited data on the stocking densities used in aquaculture in the target countries so this will have to be a continuous area of investigation for Sinergia Animal. However, we found some evidence that high stocking densities which are likely to impair welfare are common in these countries.

The main concern we identified with a stocking density ask was the lack of information available to base specific recommendations on. For many of the fish species we researched, there were few recommendations in the scientific literature about which specific stocking densities are acceptable for the welfare of the fish. Even where recommendations do exist, they may not be appropriate for all life stages or production systems.

For tilapia, the research on stocking density was better than for many other species. In particular, a “[Tilapia On-Farm Welfare Assessment Protocol for Semi-intensive Production Systems](#)” has been published which gives recommended stocking densities for different systems and life stages. We have drafted an ask based on these recommendations. However, it is important to note that the Welfare Assessment Protocol was designed in Brazil and therefore caution is required before applying the same recommendations to the target countries. In particular, it would be useful to get a better sense of what current tilapia stocking densities are like in these countries. It could be valuable to partner with academics or an organisation such as FAI Farms to further improve understanding of stocking densities in this region.



FAVOURED IF:

- You think that reducing the profitability of the aquaculture industry is very important
- You are okay with making an ask where the evidence for recommending one stocking density level over another could be questioned (even though the evidence for reducing stocking density in general is good)



LOOKS LESS PROMISING IF:

- It becomes clear that most tilapia farms in the target countries are stocking below the limits recommended by the Tilapia Welfare Assessment Protocol anyway (it would be important to collect data on this as the current data is very limited)
- You think that it would be very difficult to verify that farms are stocking according to the required limits of the ask
- You want an ask that can confidently target many different fish species at the same time

WATER QUALITY

Water quality is considered by many experts to be the most important factor in fish welfare. Poor water quality contributes to stress, disease and mortality. There is limited data on the water quality in aquaculture in the target countries. However, we found evidence that water quality was frequently poor in both pond and cage production systems in these countries.

There are many different factors which make up water quality. We identified the most important factors to control as: dissolved oxygen, pH, and ammonia. Because of the interconnected nature of water quality factors, it is likely that if these three factors could be maintained at good levels, then overall water quality would also generally be good. In order to control water quality effectively, it is important that farmers also perform regular monitoring.

We had some concerns that improving water quality on farms might mean that farmers are able to increase their stocking densities and therefore farm more fish, cancelling out the welfare benefits of improved water quality. However, farmers would not be able to increase their stocking densities too much without reducing water quality below allowable limits. Also, fish with better water quality tend to grow faster and larger, which would mean fewer fish have to be farmed or fewer farmed fish days would have to be experienced to produce the same total weight.

Overall, we concluded that water quality was a very strong ask. We felt that one set of water quality requirements (for dissolved oxygen, pH and ammonia) would be appropriate for multiple different fish species, including the ones most commonly farmed in the target countries. Because of the difficulties of controlling water quality in cages/net pens, we designed different asks for cages/net pens and ponds. Some experts raised concerns about the ability of small-scale farmers to maintain their water quality at certain levels. We have therefore attempted to find a compromise between what is optimal for welfare and what is practical to implement when designing this ask.



FAVOURED IF:

- You are keen on an ask which there is a strong expert consensus around
- You are keen on an ask for which the scientific basis is more developed
- You want an ask which works for many different fish species



LOOKS LESS PROMISING IF:

- It becomes clear that the companies being targeted by the corporate campaign already have strong water quality controls in place, although this will only reduce its value, it would not prevent this intervention from being added to a composite ask
- You believe that ensuring compliance with this ask is too challenging
- You think that improved water quality on farms would be such a big benefit to the aquaculture industry's profitability that it outweighs any welfare benefits

SLAUGHTER

Farmed fish in the target countries are usually slaughtered inhumanely, often through asphyxiation or gill cutting. These methods can take many minutes or even over an hour to kill the fish and are painful and stressful.

We examined the possibility of asking for a more humane method of slaughter, such as electrical or percussive stunning, for any of the commonly farmed fish species in the target countries. We found that for most species there was limited research on the methodology and efficacy of humane slaughter. This made us generally more skeptical about how easy or successful the implementation of electrical or percussive stunning would be in either of these countries at the present time.

We found a few examples of humane slaughter being implemented in Asian countries. For example, it appears that some pangasius in Vietnam is electrically stunned before export. It also appears that Regal Springs, a tilapia producer in Indonesia, is apparently experimenting with humane slaughter. It is encouraging that the Humane Slaughter Association is funding a research project on tilapia, pangasius, and possibly common carp. This should produce better guidelines for humane slaughter of some important farmed species in the target countries in the next few years.

We concluded that at the present time slaughter is less of a priority ask than a couple of the other asks we considered. However, we feel that this is an important ask to consider taking forward in the near future. We encourage you to monitor the publication of new research on humane slaughter methods for the main farmed fish species in the target countries. It is important that humane slaughter methods are validated in the industry setting as well as in the lab. Therefore, it would be valuable to look out for opportunities to persuade companies in the target countries to run a trial of a humane slaughter method for a fish species such as tilapia or common carp, in partnership with scientists who can monitor the outcomes.



FAVOURED IF:

- You are able to persuade a company to trial humane slaughter in partnership with scientists who can evaluate the outcomes.
- You think that processing companies can be effectively targeted by a corporate campaign
- You view the prevention of relatively brief intense suffering as significantly more valuable than chronic suffering



LOOKS LESS PROMISING IF:

- You are very skeptical that electrical/percussive stunning would be implemented well enough in practice that it delivers sufficient welfare benefits to the fish
- You prefer an ask that targets a larger portion of the fishes' lifespan

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

There are many management practices that can impact fish welfare. Poor management during processes such as grading, harvesting, transport and processing can cause injuries, stress, and raise susceptibility to disease. We focused on handling on the farm, in particular during harvest, as this is when a large part of the handling takes place. However, other management practices during grading and transport are also important to consider.

We identified many different changes to current practice that would improve fish welfare during handling, crowding and storage of fish. However, we were concerned that the ask would be difficult to communicate and also challenging to enforce, since an inspector would need to be present during harvesting (and even then, the workers could change their behaviour for that single instance). The ask is also complicated by the fact that it is common for buyers to harvest the fish rather than farmers themselves (except for integrated aquaculture companies).

Although we didn't view this ask as a priority compared to stocking density and water quality, we thought that the low cost of implementation could make it a useful addition to a more complex composite ask. Ultimately, we drafted a rough management practices ask but decided not to include it as part of any of the final ask combinations as we concluded that the low value of the ask was insufficient to justify the possible disruption to our other priority asks.



FAVOURED IF:

- You are willing to specifically target integrated aquaculture companies or the middlemen who often harvest fish
- You are willing to put resources into effectively communicating and enforcing this ask



LOOKS LESS PROMISING IF:

- You are worried about how difficult it would be to ensure compliance with this ask
- You are worried that farmers will not understand or agree with certain management practices for welfare
- You prefer an ask that targets a larger portion of the fishes' lifespans

POTENTIAL ASK COMBINATIONS

The below asks detail our current proposals. There are three asks to choose from, each with their own strengths and weaknesses.

TILAPIA COMPOSITE ASK

- Water quality for tilapia by X date
- Stocking density for tilapia by date later than X
- Work towards humane slaughter implementation for tilapia by date later than X

ALL APPROPRIATE SPECIES WATER QUALITY ASK

- Water quality for all appropriate species by X date

ALL APPROPRIATE SPECIES WATER QUALITY ASK + TILAPIA STOCKING DENSITY ASK

- Water quality for all appropriate species by X date
- Stocking density for tilapia by date later than X

If you would like to discuss any of the ask combinations in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact Animal Ask directly who would be happy to talk you through our research in more depth. The full extensive reports will be published towards the end of 2021 when Sinergia begin their work in this region.

SINERGIA ANIMAL ACTION

Sinergia Animal are currently reviewing all extensive reports. In our post-collaboration survey (completed July 2021), Sinergia Animal indicated their current preference towards the water quality ask for as many species as possible citing simplicity as the main reason for this selection. They are somewhat confident that this will be the ask used, however in their post-collaboration evaluation they indicated that they will experiment further with how extensive the ask can be. We will closely support and monitor Sinergia Animal's decision making in the coming months in order to fully understand the impact of our partnership.

PARTNERSHIP FEEDBACK

As a part of our evaluation process, we ask our partner groups to rate their experience of working with us. You can see the feedback from Sinergia Animal below.



STRONGLY AGREE

Please indicate your opinion on the following statement:
My organisation felt well informed throughout the process of working with Animal Ask



STRONGLY AGREE

Please indicate your opinion on the following statement:
My organisation feels confident in Animal Ask's abilities to carry out ask research on our behalf.



EXCELLENT

How would you rate the overall communication between Animal Ask and your organisation?



STRONGLY AGREE

Did your organisation feel well informed throughout the process of working with Animal Ask?



VERY SATISFIED

How satisfied were you with the quality of the extensive reports provided by Animal Ask?



VERY SATISFIED

How satisfied are you with the depth of the extensive reports?

How useful did you find the following parts of our research?

					VERY USEFUL
ASK OUTCOMES <i>(ROUND 1 AND ROUND 2 OUTCOMES)</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
EXTENSIVE REPORT: WELFARE INDICATOR REVIEW	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
EXTENSIVE REPORT: EXPERT INTERVIEWS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
EXTENSIVE REPORT: TRACTABILITY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
EXTENSIVE REPORT: COST EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSIS (CEA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
EXTENSIVE REPORT: CRUCIAL CONSIDERATIONS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
PROJECT OVERVIEW	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
POTENTIAL ASK COMBINATIONS <i>(WITHIN THE PROJECT OVERVIEW)</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Is there any other research we could have conducted that would have benefitted your work or decision making?

Yes, help us map supply chains.

If Animal Ask had not collaborated with you on this research project, how likely do you think it is that this ask would have been selected?



‘Animal Ask impressed us with their capacity to carry out in-depth research tailored to our needs and deliver complex findings in a very digestible manner. They were also very organised and available to have meetings to explain progress and next steps. We have no doubts that their work was extremely valuable in helping us find an optimal ask for a new area we are starting to explore.’

CAROLINA GALVANI, CEO SINERGIA ANIMAL



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