



# Centre for Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science



## **Fish Disease & Illegal Transportation Briefing Note**

### **Introduction**

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) - makes an important contribution to securing healthy and sustainable marine and freshwater environments, so that current and future generations can prosper. Further information regarding CEFAS's essential work can be found at: <http://cefas.defra.gov.uk/>.

The Cefas Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) is based in Weymouth and is responsible for preventing and controlling serious and notifiable disease in fish and other aquatic animals. They are also responsible for control of illegal importation of fish from abroad. This guide, provided by Jon Hulland, Enforcement & Investigations Inspector in the FHI, is intended to provide the essential background and highlight who to contact in the event of any intelligence being received concerning the illegal movement of fish. Due to the high reward/low risk scenario, this frequently involves carp, which, we know, are on occasions illegally imported from the continent. A recent detected case confirmed that a gang of organised criminals were responsible, intending to turn a £25,000 investment into large carp purchased in France, into £250,000 in this country. The VBS, therefore, as trained intelligence gatherers, could well receive information and contribute positively to CEFAS's enforcement work.

Enforcement is always best delivered through a partnership approach of shared endeavour. We are therefore delighted to welcome CEFAS aboard the Fisheries Enforcement Campaign as an important partner.

### **Fish Mortalities**

In any body of water holding fish, there are a number of pathogens that, given the right environmental conditions, can cause disease. Fishery managers and bailiffs alike, however, can act as the eyes and ears of those government agencies charged with preventing and controlling the spread of disease, and therefore protecting the future of the sport.

In any fishery situation, and specifically where stocking densities are held at levels higher than you would naturally expect to find in the wild, mortalities can and will occur. This may be down to something as simple as poor handling, but could be a sign of a wider, more serious issue, such as environmental stress or disease.

A single fish found dead may be nothing serious, but bailiffs should be able to spot when something is wrong with stocks, that will need reporting to the competent authority. Signs to look out for include the following:-

- Numbers of fish on or near the surface in obvious respiratory distress
- Fish displaying *Exophthalmia* or *Endophthalmia* (protruding/sunken eyes)
- Any fish showing lesions or haemorrhaging on the skin or fins (KHV/SVC)
- Carp specifically with grey or brown patches on the gills (KHV)
- Moribund or obviously darkened fish
- Mortalities that increase on a daily basis

There are specifically two notifiable diseases found in UK waters affecting carp and number of other coarse fish species. There is no treatment for these diseases. *A fishery has a legal obligation under the Aquatic Animal Health (England & Wales) Regulations 2009 to report any suspicion of these diseases to the Fish Health Inspectorate on 01305 206600 or [phi@cefias.co.uk](mailto:phi@cefias.co.uk). Your local Environment Agency office will also be able to assist.*

## Spring Viraemia of Carp (SVC)

SVC is viral disease of cyprinids that can cause 100% mortality. It is exotic to the UK, although widespread in continental Europe. Outbreaks usually occur in the spring as water temperatures rise above 7°C. Mortalities will not usually continue when the temperature goes above 17°C



SVC Can affect common and all variants of carp (mirror, koi, leather etc), grass carp, crucian carp, goldfish, tench, orfe, pike, roach and wels catfish.

Clinical signs include:

- Darkening of the skin
- Swollen eyes
- Pale gills
- Lethargy and loss of balance
- Areas of bleeding on the gills skin and internal organs.

### **Koi Herpesvirus (KHV)**

KHV is another viral disease that ONLY affects *Cyprinus carpio* and all its variants. This includes common, leather, mirror, ghost and koi carp. The virus is highly contagious and can cause up to 100% mortality. It poses a significant threat to anyone keeping or dealing in these fish.



The disease occurs at water temperatures between 15°C and 28°C. Within this range acute mortalities can be observed. There are a variety of clinical signs with KHV:

- Lethargy and isolation
- Erratic swimming behaviour
- Jumping
- Gathering at inlets and sources of oxygen
- Loss of mucus
- Sunken eyes
- Gills frequently show areas of necrosis or dead tissue

As a notifiable disease – there is a legal obligation to report any suspicion of KHV to the Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI). If the disease is found to be present, the FHI will advise on the most appropriate methods of control. This will include movement restrictions and testing for four years and the implementation of strict biosecurity measures to prevent the virus spreading to other waters.

## **Illegal Importation of Carp**

The UK's fish stocks are amongst the healthiest in Europe. This is because we have far reaching controls on what is and isn't allowed into the country, by way of live fish movements. These controls have been in place since 1937, and continue to protect our native fish from exotic diseases.

Historically, numbers of large carp have been smuggled illegally into this country from continental Europe - specifically from France. Our native carp don't grow as big as they do there, and therefore the temptation to import large, significantly cheaper, fish from abroad has always been high.

UK legislation is very clear on this subject, however: no fish may enter this country without a valid health certificate signed by the competent authority in the country of origin. Even then, fish can only come from a country of a higher or equivalent health status. *Currently there are no European countries that can meet these requirements and thus all imports from here would be considered illegal.*

The penalties for illegally importing fish without a valid health certificate range from £10,000 to a custodial sentence. It is the FHI's policy to prosecute all cases of illegal importation.

Just one imported carp that is carrying SVC has the potential to destroy our native stocks and cause the UK to lose its 'SVC free' status. This means we could lose the ability to control our imports, making our waters vulnerable to all manner of diseases that could decimate our wild stocks.

If you are offered, or hear of any large carp, or any other fish for sale that have originated from Europe, or you know of anyone who intending to import even one fish, PLEASE contact the FHI immediately on the numbers below:

Office hours **01305 206678**

and out of hours **07833 293506** gets you the duty inspector.

Alternatively, use the Crimestoppers number - which is completely anonymous. There may even be a reward.



**For further information, please contact Dilip Sarkar MBE,  
Angling Trust Fisheries Enforcement Manager:**

**Mobile: 07971 677638**

**Office: 01905 420441**

**Email: [dilip.sarkar@anglingtrust.net](mailto:dilip.sarkar@anglingtrust.net)**

**Environment Agency 24 Hour Hotline: 0800 555 111**

