

# **Standards and Procedures for Certification and Recertification of Aquatic Animal Health Inspectors**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Fish Health Section has recognized the need for a peer review system to identify those individuals possessing the competence, training, and ethical standards required to serve the fishery resource by providing aquatic animal health inspection services for non-mammalian species as mandated by domestic and foreign regulatory agencies. Individuals meeting the requirements which follow shall be eligible for certification by the Fish Health Section as "Aquatic Animal Health Inspectors." For the purposes of this certification, the terms "aquatic animal" and "fish" refer to non-mammalian vertebrate and invertebrate aquatic species. The American Fisheries Society/Fish Health Section (AFS/FHS) certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspector is a trained individual who possesses the technical skills, knowledge and experience to conduct surveillance testing and/or health inspections of aquatic animal populations for specific aquatic animal pathogens regulated by domestic and foreign agencies, according to high ethical standards. This individual has the resources to detect clinical and/or carrier disease states, as specified in the *AFS/FHS Blue Book*, the *OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals*, etc., as well as being knowledgeable of the necessary current sampling, reporting and regulatory requirements required to properly manage aquatic animal populations.

## **II. OBJECTIVES**

- A. To identify individuals with the necessary technical skills/knowledge and high ethical standards, to conduct, endorse and/or oversee aquatic animal health inspections following AFS/FHS-recommended testing and sampling procedures,
- B. To establish a peer review system within the FHS for evaluating the qualifications of those applying for certification or recertification as an Aquatic Animal Health Inspector.
- C. To provide individuals, employing organizations, regulatory agencies, and the general public with definitive minimum standards for training, experience, and ethics required by the FHS for certification as an Aquatic Animal Health Inspector.

### III. QUALIFICATIONS

#### Basic academic education (either No. 1 or No. 2 below)

1. Bachelor's degree (or higher degree) from an accredited university with a major or minor in biological science and/or wildlife and fisheries with the following academic/experience requirements;
  - a. Minimum of thirty (30) quarter or twenty (20) semester hours of college level courses, including microbiology, parasitology, virology and molecular biology, or five (5) years experience in an occupation routinely using microbiological methods or a combination of both totaling thirty (30) quarter or twenty (20) semester hours when six (6) quarter or four (4) semester hours are allowed per year of work.
2. Doctoral degree in veterinary medicine with a minimum of 30 Continuing Education hours in subjects related to aquatic animal health, such as sampling, new pathogen detection, and bio-legal and regulatory-related subjects.
3. Applicant must provide documentation for III. 1 or 2.

#### B. Professional work experience

1. Definition: Conduct or direct supervision of aquatic animal health inspections and surveillance testing. An aquatic health inspection involves the examination and testing of cultured or wild aquatic animal populations, using methods approved by the Fish Health Section of the American Fisheries Society or as specified by legally authorized regulatory agencies, to determine the presence or absence of specific pathogens. This may include travel to field sites, collection of samples, laboratory testing of samples, report writing, as well as the training and/or supervision of others to conduct these activities.
2. Requirements
  - a. At least ten (10) percent of the applicant's professional duties, during the year preceding application **and** at the time of application, should be involved in aquatic animal health inspection and/or surveillance testing. This work experience is **in addition to any work experience mentioned in III. 1. a.**
  - b. Applicant must describe how a working knowledge of aquatic animal bacteriology, virology, molecular biology and parasitology was obtained through education and experience (number 2 and 3 of application).

- c. The applicant must have access to equipment and laboratory facilities commensurate with required procedures as mentioned in III. B. 1. or if direct access to laboratory facilities is not available, documentation must be provided that service laboratory facilities, with appropriate quality assurance, are available for analysis of inspection samples.

### **C. Letters of Recommendation**

1. A total of three letters of recommendation must be submitted directly to the Professional Standards Committee Executive Secretary, to include the applicant's supervisor, at least one certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspector or Fish Pathologist (<http://www.fisheries.org/units/fhs/certific.htm>) who is familiar with the applicant and his/her work, and one additional aquatic animal health professional, as described below:
  - a. The applicant's immediate supervisor or employer must submit a Letter of Recommendation, which documents the applicant's current work status (III. B. 2. d.), access to appropriate laboratory facilities (III. B. 2. c.), technical proficiency in required disciplines (III. B. 2. b.) and, if appropriate, the previous inspection work experience (III. B. 2. a.).
  - b. Letters of Recommendation on the applicant's behalf must be submitted by a certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspector or Fish Pathologist who is familiar with the applicant and his/her work, and one other aquatic animal health professional. These letters must attest to the qualifications as stated (III. C.1.).
2. All Letters of Recommendation must address the following questions: "Can you cite any situation where the applicant acted unethically in conducting his or her professional duties? If so, explain."
3. A Letter of Recommendation form is available from the PSC Executive Secretary or on the Fish Health Section website (<http://www.fisheries.org/units/fhs/certific.htm>)

### **IV. APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

- A. Application forms may be obtained from the Professional Standards Committee Executive Secretary and on the AFS/ Fish Health Section Website (<http://www.fisheries.org/units/fhs/certific.htm>).

- B. Individuals seeking certification as an Aquatic Animal Health inspector must file completed application forms, including required supporting documents, and a \$10.00 non-refundable application fee with the Executive Secretary of the Professional Standards Committee. Applicants should promptly arrange for the forwarding of the three Letters of Recommendation to the Executive Secretary at the time they prepare the application (III.C. 1 & 2).
- C. The Professional Standards Committee shall review all applications. Upon satisfactory completion of all preliminary application requirements, the Executive Secretary of the Committee shall notify successful applicants, in writing, that they are eligible to take the written examination and must do so within one year of the notification (see V. Examination).
- D. Applications not approved by the Professional Standards Committee shall be returned to the applicant with a summary explanation of the reasons for non-approval.
- E. Applicants desiring a review of a negative decision by the Committee may file a request with the Fish Health Section President for a formal review of their application. The decision of the President shall be final.
- G. Upon notification from the Executive Secretary of the Committee that the applicant has successfully passed the examination, new applicants shall remit a certification fee of \$50.00 to the Executive Secretary of the Professional Standards Committee who will forward said fee to the Section Secretary-Treasurer. The Section President, when assured by the Chairperson of the Professional Standards Committee that all certification procedures have been completed, shall then officially notify the applicant of his/her certification as Aquatic Animal Health Inspector by a congratulatory letter and a certificate indicating the period of certification, which will be five (5) years.

## **V. EXAMINATION**

- A. All applicants, who have fulfilled the qualification requirements stated in III. A through C above shall be required to take a written examination administered by a member of the Professional Standards Committee or an agent appointed by the Committee. The examination will cover topics surrounding the proper conduct of aquatic animal health inspections as specified in Section 2 (Standard procedures for aquatic animal health inspections) of the most recent version of the AFS- FHS Blue Book: suggested procedures for the detection and identification of certain finfish and shellfish pathogens and the OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals. A list of additional study material is provided below. A

minimum score of 70% will be required to pass the written examination.

## **VI. RECERTIFICATION**

### **A. Procedures**

1. FHS certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspectors must be recertified five (5) years after initial certification and every (5) years thereafter.
2. Application for recertification may be made for up to 12 months after the expiration of the previous certification. Individuals submitting applications for recertification six years or longer after the previous certification date must repeat the entire certification process. Recertification periods will retain the original certification anniversary date regardless of how much of this grace period is used. Those whose certification has expired past the 12-month grace period may not represent themselves, directly or indirectly, as a certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspector.
3. Three months prior to each Aquatic Animal Health Inspector's five year anniversary date, the Executive Secretary of the Professional Standards Committee shall mail to the Aquatic Animal Health Inspector notification of the recertification requirement. This will include all necessary forms and instructions for this process. Every effort will be made to notify the certificate holder 3 months before their certificate expires, however the full responsibility to keep track of renewal dates lies with the inspector.
4. To be considered for recertification, the Aquatic Animal Health Inspector must submit all required information and a non-refundable \$15.00 recertification fee (personal or cashier's check made out to AFS/Fish Health Section) to the Executive Secretary of the Professional Standards Committee. He/She must also make arrangements for submission of the required Letters of Recommendation to the same Executive Secretary. All required information and the fee should be received by the Executive Secretary no less than six (6) weeks prior to expiration of the Aquatic animal Health Inspector's current five (5) year certification.
5. Immediately upon receiving all required information and the fee, the Executive Secretary will disseminate the information to the Professional Standards Committee for their consideration. All Committee members will return their recommendation, to recertify or not to recertify the applicant, to the Executive Secretary within 14 calendar days following receipt of the recertification application

NOTE: It shall be standard procedure for the Professional Standards Committee, while evaluating the recertification applications, to solicit information regarding the applicants from pertinent individuals.

6. If an applicant's certification is under investigation, the Committee will delay action on the recertification process until the revocation proceedings are resolved in favor of the applicant. If the applicant's certification is revoked, no action will be taken regarding recertification.
7. The majority vote by the Committee prevails. If two or more of the three members vote for recertification, the applicant is recertified. Any applicant for recertification, who is also a member of the Committee, is automatically disqualified from the voting process on his/her application. If, in this case, a tie vote occurs, the Executive Secretary of the Committee will forward all application materials involved to the President of the AFS/Fish Health Section. The President will then act in the same manners as a Professional Standards Committee member on the one specific application in question.
8. If the Committee action on any application is delayed for unforeseen reasons, the Chairperson of the Committee shall notify the applicant, giving reasons for the delay and an approximate date when Committee action will be completed.
9. Upon recertification the applicant shall be so notified in writing by the Executive Secretary of the Committee. With this notification, the Aquatic Animal Health Inspector will receive a seal, indicating the year of recertification, which is to be affixed to the original certificate where indicated.
10. Any applicant denied recertification shall be so notified in writing by the Chairperson of the Committee with specific reasons for denying recertification.
11. Unsuccessful applicants desiring a review of a negative decision by the Committee regarding their recertification may file a request with the President of the AFS/Fish Health Section for a formal review of their recertification credentials. It will be incumbent upon the President to solicit pertinent information, in addition to the original recertification application. The decision of the President is final and must be sent to the applicant in writing within 60 days of receiving the appeal request.

## B. Requirements

1. To be considered for recertification, the applicant must meet all of the following criteria.
  - a. During the previous five-year certification period, the individual must have been actively engaged at a minimum rate of 10% of the total work time (approximately 25 days per year for full time employment) in the conduct or direct supervision of fish health inspections and surveillance testing.
  - b. Within the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the certification period, the applicant must be actively engaged at a minimum rate of 10% of the total work time (full time employment) in the conduct or direct supervision of aquatic animal health inspections and surveillance testing.
  - c. Each individual must remain a member of the AFS/FHS for each of the five years prior to recertification.
2. The applicant must continue to have access to equipment and laboratory facilities commensurate with required procedures as mentioned in III. B. 1. or if direct access to laboratory facilities is not available, documentation must be provided that service laboratory facilities, with appropriate quality assurance, are available for analysis of inspection samples.
3. Recertification applicants must submit an itemized record of credits earned through continuing education activities which meet the following criteria.
  - a. Credits may be earned by attending professional meetings (including workshops and conferences), taking extension or regular college courses, short courses, or formal correspondence-type courses regardless of medium. All qualifying courses must provide documentation of completion. For meeting attendance, an adequate description of each meeting with the hours of in-session attendance is required.
  - b. A minimum of 60 credits accumulated during the preceding five year certification period are required. At least 30 credits must be earned in subjects directly related to aquatic animal health inspection sampling, new pathogen detection, and bio-legal and regulatory-related subjects. The remainder of the credits may be earned in any of the following related categories: (1) aquatic animal biology, (2) veterinary or human medicine, (3)

microbiology, toxicology, pathology, water quality, pharmacology, or other sciences that provide relevant continuing education.

- c. One unit of credit is obtained for each clock hour of in-session meeting or class attendance, except units for courses that carry college credit, which are calculated as 15 units for each semester hour or 10 units for each quarter hour of academic credit. Presentation or organization of short courses, annual meetings, or university courses provides the same number of credits as attending. However, multiple presentations of the same or similar subject material can only be credited once during a certification period.
  - d. Continuing education activities offered for credit toward recertification are subject to approval by the Professional Standards Committee. Each applicant must retain independent documentation of all continuing education credits. This documentation must be produced for inspection and verification if requested by the Professional Standards Committee during its evaluation process.
4. The applicant, his or her supervisor, and one certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspector or Fish Pathologist, shall certify in writing that those requirements listed above in V.B.1. and V.B.2. have been fulfilled. If self-employed, the applicant and two certified Aquatic Animal Health Inspectors or Fish Pathologists must provide the above information. All recommendations must be sent directly the Executive Secretary of the Committee by those preparing them. A Letter of Recommendation form is available from the PSC Executive Secretary or on the Fish Health Section website(<http://www.fisheries.org/units/fhs/certific.htm>).

## **VII. REVOCATION**

- A. The Aquatic Animal Health Inspector certification may be revoked by the Professional Standards Committee for reasons such as gross negligence, incompetence, falsification of data or reports, misrepresentation, acceptance of a bribe or any other action determined by the Professional Standards Committee to be professionally unethical.
- B. Information concerning unethical action as indicated in A above should be filed with the Chairperson of the Professional Standards Committee.

Suggested Study Material for Certification Examination as an Aquatic Animal Health Inspector:

- Most recent version: USFWS and AFS-FHS (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and American Fisheries Society-Fish Health Section). **Section 2:** Standard procedures for aquatic animal health inspections. *In* AFS-FHS. FHS blue book: suggested procedures for the detection and identification of certain finfish and shellfish pathogens. AFS-FHS, Bethesda, Maryland. (<http://www.fisheries.org/units/fhs/>)
- Most recent versions: Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals and International Aquatic Animal Health Code. OIE (World Organization of Animal Health), Paris, France ([www.oie.int](http://www.oie.int)) , Part 1, Part 2 (2.3.4 to 2.3.9).
- FHS Continuing Education Course Notebooks
- Canadian Fish Health Protection Regulations, [http://www.dfompo.gc.ca/science/aquaculture/aah/manual\\_of\\_compliance\\_e.htm](http://www.dfompo.gc.ca/science/aquaculture/aah/manual_of_compliance_e.htm)