

Tagging of live fish for competition purposes

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The Council for Animal Ethics has been made aware, by the Norwegian Animal Protection Alliance, that a new form of angling competition is gaining popularity in the country. The competitions in question are ones where the contestants gain points for catching fish that have been tagged specifically for the purpose of the competition. The aim of these events is to gain publicity and interest for angling, and to attract tourists.

Fish that have been reared or caught specifically for the purpose are marked with an external visible tag before being released. A limited number of fish are tagged, and prizes are awarded contestants who catch one of these fish.

Several different types of tags and methods for tagging of fish are available. These vary in the amount of harm they cause to the fish. However, even gentle tagging invariably causes a certain level of stress to fish because they are caught, possibly anaesthetised, handled out of the water and tagged by penetration of the skin. The tag itself may also negatively affect the fish for example by increasing resistance in the water during swimming. Skin which is penetrated during tagging represents a possible entry point for infection. When fish are tagged for research purposes, the procedure must be approved by the person in charge of research animals at the institution.

From an ethical point of view, the Council for Animal Ethics is of the opinion that in the described type of angling competition animals are used unnecessarily, and that they should be stopped. These competitions are in conflict with the principles laid down in the report to the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) on animal ethics No. 12 (2002-2003) where it is written that animals, including fish, have intrinsic value and should be treated with respect, and that human beings should strive to prevent disease, injury and pain. In all forms of fishing the fishermen should be encouraged to treat and kill the fish in a responsible manner with consideration for the fish. The type of angling competition in question does the opposite, by reifying the fish. The Council believes that angling competitions can be performed without prior catching and tagging and that prizes can be awarded for the size of the fish or other pre-determined standards.