



**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL  
FOR ANIMAL WELFARE**

# **Suffering for Sale**

**Shrimp Welfare in European Supermarkets**

*October, 1, 2025*

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## **Introduction**

### ***Why does shrimp welfare matter ?***

Shrimp are the most farmed animal in the world with an estimated 440 billion of shrimp killed each year on farms. The number of farmed shrimp killed each year is superior to the number of fish killed in aquaculture or chickens killed for their meat.<sup>1</sup>

However, shrimp are commonly overlooked in corporate animal welfare policies. With more and more people switching their diet away from red meat, the consumption of shrimp is expected to increase. Without impactful shrimp welfare policies, this will result in more and more animals suffering terrible farming conditions.

### ***How are shrimp produced ?***

Around the world, approximately 440 billion farmed shrimp are slaughtered each year. These shrimp are primarily born and raised in the Global South, in countries such as Ecuador, China, India, Venezuela, and Vietnam, before being exported to the Global North, which includes Japan, the United States, and Europe.



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<sup>1</sup> Waldhorn, Autric, "Shrimp: the animals most commonly used and killed for food production", *Rethink Priority*, 2023, [https://osf.io/preprints/osf/b8n3t\\_v1](https://osf.io/preprints/osf/b8n3t_v1)

According to the FAO, in 2024, Ecuador was the leading exporter of shrimp, followed by India, Vietnam, China, and Argentina<sup>2</sup>. During the same period, imports increased in the largest European markets: France, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

Unlike other animals raised for food, consumers are often unaware of the living and slaughter conditions of shrimp, as these processes typically occur on the other side of the world. However, when confronted with the reality of shrimp farming, consumers are often shocked and outraged.

While industry associations try to market shrimp as "the happy protein"<sup>3</sup>, the reality for shrimp looks starkly different: many have their eyes cut off or are suffocated to death.

Supermarkets hold the most negotiation power in this system because they buy and sell in large quantities. They are known to use this position to bargain for low prices and high quality standards<sup>4</sup>.

**Retailers have a responsibility to ban the worst practices in shrimp farming by adopting meaningful shrimp welfare policies that will positively impact these animals on the other side of the world.**

### *Are shrimp sentient ?*

Sentience is defined as the capacity to experience feelings, including both positive and negative sensations. Shrimp and all decapod crustaceans have been recognized as sentient and should be afforded protection accordingly.

- In 2005, the European Food Safety Authority published its Scientific Opinion on the "Aspects of the Biology and Welfare of Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes"<sup>5</sup> in which decapod crustaceans were classified in Category 1: *"As a consequence of this evidence, it is concluded that cyclostomes, all Cephalopoda and decapod crustaceans fall into the same category of animals as those that are at present protected. "* Category 1 includes all animals that meet the following definition: *"The scientific evidence clearly indicates that those groups of animals are able to experience pain and distress, or the evidence, either directly or by analogy with animals in the same taxonomic group(s), are able to experience pain and distress."*

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<sup>2</sup> FAO, "Shrimp", *Globefish quarterly species analysis*,

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/91dc11fb-8690-48bd-93eb-41dbc72df504/content>

<sup>3</sup> <https://shrimphappyprotein.com/>

<sup>4</sup> "Hidden Harvest", *Corporate Accountability Lab*, 2024

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5810dda3e3df28ce37b58357/t/662fdc4aeb0a96a43f7e29e/1714412623492/Hidden+Harvest.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Opinion on the "Aspects of the biology and welfare of animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes", *The EFSA Journal*, 2005, <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2005.292>

- In November 2021, the London School of Economics and Political Science<sup>6</sup> published a review of the scientific evidence on the sentience of decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs, stating, *"We recommend that all cephalopod molluscs and decapod crustaceans be regarded as sentient."*

Several European countries, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Austria, and Norway, have legally recognized decapod crustaceans as sentient beings and have incorporated provisions regarding their treatment on farms and during slaughter.

### ***ICAW's Engagement with Retailers on Shrimp Welfare***

Through sustained corporate engagement and targeted campaigning, ICAW is working to transform shrimp welfare standards across Europe's leading retailers, ensuring that meaningful improvements reach millions of animals in aquaculture.

ICAW is actively engaging with major European retailers across multiple markets to secure meaningful, time-bound commitments to phase out eyestalk ablation and introduce pre-slaughter electric stunning. These basic welfare standards are straightforward to implement and deliver a tangible improvement for millions of shrimp.

This approach has already driven significant progress. Following sustained engagement with ICAW, Waitrose and Co-op committed to higher shrimp welfare standards in early 2025, with Morrisons joining them in June 2025.

While ICAW prioritizes dialogue, we also hold retailers accountable when progress stalls. In May 2025, ICAW launched its first shrimp welfare campaign targeting UK retailer Iceland Foods due to its continued lack of commitment and refusal to engage. The campaign combined digital advocacy, public awareness activities, and in-person demonstrations, sending a strong signal that inaction on shrimp welfare is no longer acceptable.

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<sup>6</sup> Birch, Burn, Schnell, Browning and Crump, "Review of the Evidence of Sentience in Cephalopod Molluscs and Decapod Crustaceans", *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2021, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/news/news-Assets/PDFs/2021/Sentience-in-Cephalopod-Molluscs-and-Decapod-Crustaceans-Final-Report-November-2021.pdf>



In July 2025, following sustained public pressure, Iceland committed to eliminating eyestalk ablation and introducing pre-slaughter electric stunning across its entire shrimp supply chain by 2027.

With the majority of UK retailers now pledged to higher shrimp welfare standards, ICAW will build on this momentum and expand its campaigns to other key European markets to secure similar commitments and drive industry-wide change.

## **Companies evaluated**

As part of our efforts to secure stronger shrimp welfare policies, we have been engaging with leading retailers across six major shrimp-importing countries in Europe: France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium.

While this list does not yet cover all European markets, we aim to expand our work to other key shrimp-importing countries in the near future.



## **Ranking criteria**

Retailers are evaluated based on their commitment to eliminating two cruel practices within their shrimp supply chains:

- Eyestalk ablation,
- Suffocation in Ice-sludge (ice-slurry).

The welfare of farmed shrimp depends on several factors, including water quality, stocking density, handling, and transport. These factors vary greatly between farms and are often difficult to control. That is why, in a first step towards basic shrimp welfare, we suggest a narrow focus to ban two widespread practices that both cause a lot of suffering and are easy and cheap to remedy at the same time.

### ***What is eyestalk ablation ?***

Reproductive female shrimp in hatcheries are subjected to a painful and inhumane practice known as eyestalk ablation, which is claimed to enhance productivity.

Eyestalk ablation involves cutting off one or both eyestalks from a female shrimp, while fully conscious, using a razor blade or hot scissors, without anesthesia. This procedure has become a

standard practice in the shrimp industry because it increases egg production, although it subjects the shrimp to severe mutilation.



However, recent scientific studies have demonstrated that eyestalk ablation has numerous negative effects on both the ablated shrimp and its offspring. This practice can lead to increased mortality rates, making larvae weak and more susceptible to disease<sup>7</sup>. Research also indicates that comparable productivity levels can be achieved without performing this mutilation: *"The finding also revealed non-ablated species to significantly meet commercial production at a reduced cost with optimum health status"*<sup>8</sup>

To date, the scientific consensus is clear: *"Though the method has been applauded for its reproductive capacity, with these numerous side effects, its further use without positive modification becomes an unhealthy method that need not be sustained."*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Zacarias, Fegan, Wangsoontorn, Yamuen, Limakon, Carboni, Davie, Metselaar, Little and Shinn, "Increased robustness of postlarvae and juveniles from non-ablated Pacific whiteleg shrimp, *Penaeus vannamei*, broodstock post-challenged with pathogenic isolates of *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (VpAHPND) and white spot disease (WSD)", *Aquaculture*, Volume 532, 2021,

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0044848620312576?via%3Dihub>

<sup>8</sup> Irabor, Oghenenyehowwo, Olele and Pierre, "Eyestalk ablation in crustacean production a brief review of the advantages, disadvantages, and public opinions", *International Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development*, Volume 27(1), 2024,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381670861\\_EYESTALK\\_ABLATION\\_IN\\_CRUSTACEAN\\_PRODUCTION\\_A\\_BRIEF\\_REVIEW\\_OF\\_THE\\_ADVANTAGES\\_DISADVANTAGES\\_AND\\_PUBLIC\\_OPINIONS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381670861_EYESTALK_ABLATION_IN_CRUSTACEAN_PRODUCTION_A_BRIEF_REVIEW_OF_THE_ADVANTAGES_DISADVANTAGES_AND_PUBLIC_OPINIONS)

<sup>9</sup> ibid



Several certification schemes, such as Global G.A.P and EU Organic, do not certify farms that use larvae from shrimp subjected to eyestalk ablation. The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) has decided to phase out eyestalk ablation, starting in 2025, with a target completion date no later than 2031.

### ***How are shrimp slaughtered ?***

The most common method for slaughtering shrimp on farms is the use of ice slurry. In theory, shrimp are killed through thermal shock by being immersed in ice-cold water until death. However, there is no evidence confirming the effectiveness of ice-slurry in rendering shrimp insensible, and several factors influence its efficiency. Unfortunately, standardized practices for commercial-scale farms are lacking.

In practice, on farms, shrimp are placed in large quantities in ice sludge, raising concerns about whether each individual is fully submerged. Footage also shows shrimp regaining consciousness after being immersed for too short a period or not stunned at all, resulting in slow suffocation. Without specific standards—such as temperature and density—shrimp may die from slow suffocation while remaining fully conscious.

For decapod crustaceans, such as shrimp, crabs, or lobster, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that electrical stunning is the most humane option. A recent review by the London School of Economics states: *"We have medium confidence that electrical stunning is effective at rendering decapods unconscious. There is evidence that it produces a seizure-like state in which the animal is unresponsive and plausibly unconscious. We have no confidence that chilling makes decapods unconscious."*<sup>10</sup>

Preliminary results from the University of Stirling, presented in March 2024 at the 4th FSVO/UFAW Symposium in Switzerland, comparing ice slurry and electrical stunning, [highlight](#) the greater effectiveness of electrical stunning in inducing quicker narcosis than in ice slurry.

While a commercial-scale study is ongoing to confirm these results and establish standard parameters for effective electrical stunning, based on the latest available scientific research, we consider electrical stunning to be the most effective method, followed by ice slurry as a *slaughter* technique.

### **Company Ranking**<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Birch, Burn, Schnell, Browning and Crump, "Review of the Evidence of Sentience in Cephalopod Molluscs and Decapod Crustaceans", *The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2021, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/news/news-Assets/PDFs/2021/Sentience-in-Cephalopod-Molluscs-and-Decapod-Crustaceans-Final-Report-November-2021.pdf>





<sup>11</sup> Based on publicly available data as of September 26, 2025.

NAME	RANKING	INFO
MARKS & SPENCER		100% eyestalk ablation-free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by the end of 2026. <a href="#">Link</a>
		100% eyestalk ablation-free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by the end of 2025 <a href="#">Link</a>
TESCO		Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning for P. Vannamei by 2026 and eliminating eyestalk ablation for P. Vannamei and P. Monodon by 2026 and 2027, respectively. <a href="#">Link</a>
Sainsbury's		100% eyestalk ablation-free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by the end of 2026. <a href="#">Link</a>
		Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning and eliminating eyestalk ablation by the end of 2025. <a href="#">Link</a>
WAITROSE & PARTNERS		100% eyestalk ablation-free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by the end of 2026. <a href="#">Link</a>

		100% eyestalk ablation-free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by the end of 2027. <a href="#">Link</a>
		Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning and eliminating eyestalk ablation by the end of 2027. <a href="#">Link</a>
		Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning and eliminating eyestalk ablation by the end of 2027. <a href="#">Link</a>
		100% eyestalk ablation free. Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by 2028 <a href="#">Link</a>
		Committed to implementing pre-slaughter electric stunning by 2030 and eliminating eyestalk ablation by 2026. <a href="#">Link</a>
		No timeline to implement pre-slaughter electric stunning. Relies on ASC certification to phase out eyestalk ablation by 2031. <a href="#">Aldi Nord Link</a> <a href="#">Aldi South Link</a>

		No commitment to implement pre-slaughter electric stunning. Relies on ASC certification to phase out eyestalk ablation by 2031. <a href="#">Link</a>
		
		
		
		
		

## **Conclusion**

Shrimp welfare is steadily gaining momentum across Europe, with several leading retailers now committed to phasing out eyestalk ablation and adopting pre-slaughter electric stunning—setting important new benchmarks for the industry. At the same time, scientific recognition of shrimp sentience and the proven effectiveness of humane slaughter methods continues to strengthen.

As aquaculture expands and shrimp remains considered as a key source of sustainable protein, it is vital that retailers take responsibility for ensuring meaningful welfare standards throughout their supply chains. With consumers increasingly concerned about the conditions in which animals are raised and slaughtered, higher welfare practices are not only an ethical obligation but also a business imperative.

ICAW urges retailers that have yet to act to commit publicly and promptly to higher welfare standards for shrimp. Now is the time to end these cruel practices and move the industry towards a more humane future.

Take action and urge European retailers to put an end to this cruel animal abuse, [join RAVEN!](#)