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# University of Stirling's new grant aims to advance fish welfare and responsible aquaculture in Southeast Asia

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## A new project led by the University of Stirling will improve farmed fish welfare in Southeast Asia through research, training and regional collaboration

The University of Stirling has received more than £2 million (approximately \$2.6 million) in funding for a new project aimed at improving the welfare of farmed fish in Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The three-year initiative, led by Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture, is supported by a \$2.7 million grant from Open Philanthropy, an international organization that funds work across a range of global issues.

"Across Asia, there are serious welfare issues that affect millions of aquatic animals and there is an urgent need to drive change," said Professor Dave Little, project lead and Deputy Head of the Institute of Aquaculture. "In addition, there is very little awareness about the importance of improving the situation, and we believe that projects such as this can help to change that."

The project builds on a previous initiative funded by Open Philanthropy that focused on improving



The University of Stirling has received over \$2.6 million in funding for a new project aimed at improving fish welfare and supporting sustainable aquaculture in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Photo courtesy of the University of Stirling.

farmed fish welfare in Thailand and Vietnam. This new effort expands that work to include Indonesia and supports the continued development of the Asia Fish Welfare Network.



(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

Earlier phases of the project aimed to raise awareness and knowledge among stakeholders across the farmed fish value chain – from production to market – in regions where fish is a dietary staple and aquaculture operations are among the largest globally.



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“Understanding consumer and other stakeholders’ perceptions is critical to improving practices throughout the value chain, by identifying and targeting areas that could improve welfare the most,” said Little. “In the first project, we identified harvest through to slaughter as being critical points where practice could most effectively be improved. We hope that this significant research funding will help to build on our work to date that is focused on improving aquatic animal welfare, and its role as an ethical food choice, while also being of economic importance to the countries.”

The new funding will support a series of research studies in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, exploring various aspects of fish welfare, including practical practices, biological needs and social and economic considerations. The project will also deliver workshops and outreach activities for academics and aquaculture practitioners and expand exchange and mentorship programs aimed at strengthening networks and institutional capacity.

In addition, six fully funded scholarships will be offered to students from the three target countries to pursue a master’s degree at the University of Stirling’s Institute of Aquaculture, helping to cultivate local expertise and sustain long-term progress in fish welfare.

“The team has prioritized building and supporting local fish welfare research communities in Thailand and Vietnam and has partnered with industry and policymakers to maximize the chances that the fish welfare improvements resulting from their work are taken up sustainably,” said Michelle Lavery,



Program Associate, Farm Animal Welfare at Open Philanthropy. "This kind of field-building and industry-facing groundwork is important for fish welfare now and into the future."

The announcement comes as the university nears completion of its National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (<https://www.globalseafood.org/advocate/new-uk-aquaculture-hub-aims-to-drive-industry-innovation-and-sustainability/>). (NATIH), a £17 million (US \$22 million) government-funded facility that will advance modern aquaculture practices. Integrated with the Institute of Aquaculture, NATIH will focus on challenges such as fish welfare and environmental impact to support the UK's leadership in the sector.

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