

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION AND ROUNDTABLE SESSION 4. CRAYFISH PATHOLOGY IN EUROPE: PAST, PRESENT AND A PROGRAMME FOR THE FUTURE



The devastating affects of disease on European freshwater crayfish are well known as epizootics in wild populations have occurred throughout much of Europe since the mid XVIIIe s. After protracted and rigorous debate, the cause of the disease named crayfish plague was proved to be the fungus *Aphanomyces astaci* in 1934. In the last 70 years, much of the research conducted in the field of crayfish pathology has concentrated on fungi, especially improving diagnostic techniques for *A. astaci*. Similarly, diagnostic responses to epizootics in European crayfish have concentrated almost entirely on fungal isolation and/or identification. On the other hand, viruses have proved to be the most important pathogens in the growing global crustacean aquaculture and fishery industries. Rickettsia-like organisms (RLO) are also important. Critically, diagnostic techniques necessary to detect the full range of potential pathogens of crayfish are rarely utilized in the field of crayfish pathology in Europe. Histopathological analysis, required for the diagnosis of infections by viruses and RLOs, is absent from most European studies. Epizootics unrelated to *A. astaci* in European crayfish and epizootics in introduced American crayfish species highlight the inadequate current

state of knowledge in the field. Presently, the field is ill-equipped to determine the cause(s) of these epizootics. Moreover, crayfish conservation strategies may be undermined and even detrimental to the longterm goals; eg., stocking programs may spread undetected pathogens. Therefore, critical limitations in the field of crayfish pathology have major repercussions in management of freshwater crayfish. Guiding principles and a concept for a trans-European Community research and education program were developed to address this serious issue and are presented herein.

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