Intentional transfers of numerous bivalve species have had a long tradition and are commonly conducted along the European Atlantic coast. However, numerous studies have concluded that intentional transfer of species for aquaculture purposes is one of the most principal vectors for the introduction of exotic species around the world. Threats due to the transfer and introduction of species have been identified and a range of global and regional agreements, guidelines, standards and statutes to minimize effects have been established. Yet, whether such regulations can protect and conserve the marine environment and address economic considerations remains unanswered. This study provides the first overview of bivalve transfer activities for aquaculture purposes along the European Atlantic coast. Existing international and EU legislation is described, and potential weaknesses in the existing legislative frameworks are discussed. Recommendations for the development of integrated risk assessment methods are given. These may help to minimize the intrinsic threats of transfer activities in marine environments. The resulting impacts and effects of transfer activities of bivalves for aquaculture purpose are addressed in detail in a companion paper.