

Aquaculture Advisory Council

General Assembly

Minutes

Brussels, 8th September 2020 (09:30-16:00)

Attendants: **Javier Ojeda** (Chair), **Leo Kirchmaier** (ALFAA), **Melanie Haslauer** (ALFAA), **Oliver Robinson** (British Trout Association), **Brian Curran** (Coastwatch Europe), **Federico Facchin** (COPA COGECA), **Ana Peroš** (Croatian Aquaculture Association), **Jan Kappel** (EAA), **Søren Anker Pedersen** (European Fishmeal), **Catherine Pons** (FEAP), **Maria Luisa Alvarez Blanco** (FEDEPESCA), **Ole Christensen** (FEFAC), **Sandrine Rambert** (FFA), **Nancy De Briyne** (FVE), **Sarah Moody** (FVE), **Constantin Muraru** (IPIFF), **Anna Pyć** (Polish Trout Breeders Association), **Catalin Platon** (ROMFISH), **Béla Halasi-Kovács** (COGECA), **Stéphane Angeri** (SNEC), **Paul Denekamp** (Stichting Vissenbescherming), **Ana Granados** (EFFAB), **Fernando Gonçalves** (APA), **Andrea Fabris** (API), **Bernhard Feneis** (COGECA), **Marco Gilmozzi** (FEAP), **Szilvia Mihalfy** (FEAP), **Bruno Guillaumie** (EMPA), **Sarah Horsfall** (SAGB), **Philippe Le Gal** (CRC Bretagne Sud), **Marine Levadoux** (CIPA), **Teresa Morrissey** (IFA), **Ola Öberg** (RECIRKFISK), **Erik Bjorn Olsen** (Danish Society for a living Sea), **Yannis Pelekanakis** (Federation of Greek Maricultures), **Pierpaolo Piva** (FAI CISL), **Anne-Laure Prego-Cauchet** (CNC), **Giuseppe Prioli** (AMA), **Addy Risseeuw** (PO Mosselcultuur), **Pier Antonio Salvador** (COPA), **Danilo Santini** (FAI CISL), **Wouter van Zandbrink** (PO Mosselcultuur), **Douglas Waley** (Eurogroup for Animals), **Phil Brooke** (CIWF), **Jean-Yves Le Goff** (CRC Pays de la Loire), **Marie-Christine Monfort** (WSI), **Jean-Christophe Raymond** (CNPMEM), **Brian Thomsen** (Danish Aquaculture Organisation), **Cécile Fouquet** (Secretariat), **Charlotte Musquar** (Secretariat), **Pedro Reis Santos** (MAC), **Paloma Carballo** (Secretaría General de Pesca (España)), **Julián García Baena** (Secretaría General de Pesca (España)), **Ulfert Focken** (Thünen-Institute of Fisheries Ecology (TI-FI)), **Tamara Talevska** (NSAC), **Mar Romero** (IPac. Acuicultura), **Sabin Ciornea** (Assistant to MEP Carmen Avram), **Pascale Colson** (DG MARE), **Lorella de la Cruz** (DG MARE), **Julia Rubeck** (DG MARE)

Excused: **Marc-Philip Buckhout** (Seas at Risk), **Goulven Brest** (CRC Bretagne-Nord)

Abbreviations: **DG** (Directorate-General); **EC** (European Commission); **Excom** (Executive Committee), **GA** (General Assembly), **MAC** (Market Advisory Council); **RoP** (Rules of Procedure); **WP** (Work Programme); **F2F** (Farm to Fork); **EMFF** (European Maritime and Fisheries); **CFP** (Common Fisheries Policy); **CAP** (Common Agricultural Policy)

1. Welcome words by the Chair

The Chair welcomed the participants. He excused **Commissioner Sinkevičius** who, despite his best efforts, could not be present due to other obligations and gave a special greeting to **Marius Vaščega**, **Head of Cabinet for Commissioner Sinkevičius** who accepted to represent him. He gave a warm welcome to **MEP Mrs. Clara Aguilera**, **referent for the AAC in the PECH Committee**, the representatives of the Members States, especially **Mrs. Soizic Schwartz from the French Ministry**, and to **STECF Vice-Chair, Dr. Ralf Döring**.



This 2020 General Assembly should be an opportunity to reflect on the role of sustainable aquaculture in the context of the Green Deal. **The Chair** concluded his introduction by calling to the EU institutions and representatives of the Member States to support the development of EU aquaculture, a sustainable and innovative sector which, despite all its benefits, is today stagnating.

2. The AAC's contribution to the Green Deal objectives

After a short introduction by the AAC Chair, **MEP Mrs. Clara Aguilera**, referent for the AAC in the PECH Committee of the European Parliament, gave a short presentation, mentioning the two main strategies presently of interest for the AAC, the F2F Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy, and reminded the AAC members that she is herself Rapporteur for her political group (S&D) on the F2F Strategy. As such, she expressed her interest to hear views from the AAC. Due to some technical issues with interpretation during the meeting, the Chair announced that the translation of her speech will be made available in English, French and Italian shortly after the meeting.

Commissioner Sinkevičius had prepared a short video allocution that was shown to the AAC members.

Marius Vaščega (Head of Cabinet for Commissioner Sinkevičius) took the occasion to thank the AAC for the invitation and apologized on behalf of the Commissioner, mentioning that he would love to have a direct exchange with the members on another occasion. He also acknowledged the fact that, indeed, the growth of aquaculture in the EU is limited but that he thinks the new strategic guidelines for a sustainable aquaculture will address in a comprehensive way the outstanding barriers. To him, the key challenge is making the consumer aware of the high standards of EU aquaculture and, with this objective, the EC is considering in its guidelines to launch an EU wide communication campaign next year, as well as to organise a big stakeholders event.

Catalin Platon (ROMFISH) asked the Commissioner representative if, taking into consideration that farmed fish and seafood generate a lower carbon footprint than animal production on land but that the support schemes for aquaculture are quite minor compared to agriculture, he considers that the sector should be entitled to have, in the revised CFP, a pillar similar to the first one of the CAP.

Marius Vaščega (Head of Cabinet for Commissioner Sinkevičius) answered that he thinks that the EMFF and other EU funds provide a substantial amount of support to aquaculture. In the negotiations for the 2021-2027 fund for the EMFF, the objective is to make sure that this level of help is maintained.

Douglas Waley (Eurogroup for Animals) asked Mrs Aguilera if she saw scope or benefits for aligning fish welfare labelling requirements with terrestrial animal products. **MEP Mrs. Clara Aguilera** answered that she does, but that more information is needed regarding fish welfare.

Douglas Waley (Eurogroup for Animals) thanked the Commissioner representative for the animal welfare objectives in the F2F Strategy. There is consensus in the AAC that EC Animal Welfare Reference centres could link knowledge to practical measures for the sector and asked if the Commission could consider this

tool.

Marius Vaščega (Head of Cabinet for Commissioner Sinkevičius) answered that animal welfare should be part of the new guidelines, that they are presently considering several tools. An analysis of the impact assessment results of the F2F Strategy regarding animal welfare is needed before taking any decisions in this field.

Due to the limited amount of time allowed for discussion, both Mrs Aguilera and Mr. Vaščega offered to receive all other questions by AAC members by e-mail, to which they will answer by writing.

3. How can the European Aquaculture sector contribute to the Green Deal objectives

Dr. Ralph Döring, Vice-chair of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF), presented the STECF Report 2018 on *The Economic Performance of the EU Aquaculture Sector*.

In the Q&A session, **Marine Levadoux (CIPA)** mentioned that the report is difficult to use at the French level due to a lack of time given for analysis and mixed data between finfish and shellfish. She suggested that the focus should shift from quantity to quality regarding this data, in order to have a better picture of European aquaculture.

Dr. Ralph Döring (STECF Vice-chair) answered that if they only focus on robust data, they will not have a real overview of the whole European sector. He suggested that having some aquaculture experts' observers to their meetings could help consolidating their reports.

Andrea Fabris (API) suggested a greater and direct involvement of the aquaculture sector associations in the STECF's data collection work.

Bernhard Feneis (COGECA) regretted the lack of suggestions in the report to support the growth of EU aquaculture.

Ola Öberg (RECIRKFIK) recalled that, in spite of all efforts to develop EU aquaculture, the sector was not growing. He asked Dr. Döring if he sees forces blocking this growth.

Dr. Ralph Döring (STECF Vice-chair) considers that there are several factors: regulation (including environmental regulation), administrative barriers and economic reasons. There has been a lot of innovation recently but maybe not always addressing the most important problems.

Soizic Schwartz, representative of the French Ministry of agriculture, gave a presentation on the recent policy initiatives to support the sustainable development of aquaculture in France.

In the Q&A session, **Paul Denekamp (Stichting Vissenbescherming)** asked if Mrs. Schwartz estimated that fish in French farms are properly killed. She was sorry to say that this was not her specialisation topic but she mentioned that a platform for fish welfare has recently been created gathering fish aquaculture professionals and the Ministry of agriculture.

Ola Öberg (RECIRKFIK) asked if Mrs. Schwartz sees economic reasons for aquaculture not growing in France. She answered that she considers that there is a conjunction of regulation measures and economic factors. Innovative projects can be very costly and EMFF support is not always sufficient.

Marine Levadoux (CIPA) commented that this presentation shows that the Ministry of Agriculture's good will is not sufficient for the sector to grow. The problem in her view is the absence of clarity of environmental regulations at the local level (too many different local interpretations of European directives).

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) agreed with Mrs. Levadoux, adding that this was especially true with space availability, which is the core problem for a real increase of shellfish production.

Mrs. Schwartz agreed that regulation should be made more reliable, that more visibility for the public and neighbours should be given about the advantages of local aquaculture.

4. Agenda and last GA minutes

The agenda was adopted with no further change.

The minutes were adopted with no further change.

5. 2020-2021 AAC Work Programme

The Secretariat presented the 2020-2021 AAC Work Programme.

The Work Programme was adopted as presented.

6. 2020-2021 AAC Budget

The Secretariat presented the 2020-2021 AAC Budget.

Phil Brooke (CIWF) asked about the availability of funding for a potential 4th Working Group.

The Secretariat said that the rules on how ACs can spend their budget have been modified this year and it will be much easier to change the allocation of funds during the year. Therefore, if a new WG is created, the ExCom can decide to reallocate some money to finance it.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) added that, if a permanent FG is sufficient for the purpose, it should remain as such. Indeed the implementation of a new WG needs to change Statutes and RoP with specific quorum and vote rules, while an FG needs just an EXCOM's decision. **Bernhard Feneis (COGECA)** agreed with this position.

The Chair reminded that this debate is not on the meeting's agenda and asked for the approval of the budget.

The Budget was adopted as presented.

7. Revision of the AAC reimbursement rules

The Chair recalled that the AAC has one of the lowest reimbursement rates for its participants travel expenses compared to the other ACs. He had received some complaints about that from the members, thus the revision now proposed. **The Secretariat** reminded that the EC does not allow for the redistribution of the left-

over money at the end of the financial year to compensate the member who may have had higher travel expenses.

The Secretariat presented the proposed revision.

	Proposed revision	AAC Current rules
Per diem	92 € (62€ if lunch provided, or adapted to the real cost)	50 € (35 € if lunch provided)
Car mileage	0.22 € / km	0.18 € / km

The revision was adopted as presented.

The Chair added that the EC has confirmed that there is no possibility in the EU regulation for a compensation for the participation of members in virtual AAC meetings.

8. Renewal of the Secretariat services contract

The Chair presented the recommendation of the ExCom. Beside the score system that he had just explained, he wanted to acknowledge the good work of **AliénorEU** as the AAC Secretariat during the three past years, underlining that they managed to keep a good and fluent relationship with the EC as well as to demonstrate a total impartiality in their relationship with the AAC members.

Nancy De Briyne (FVE) agreed with the ExCom recommendation and added that the quality of the services should prevail on the lower prices. Several other members also expressed their agreement and **Ana Granados (EFFAB)** added that knowing each other and having a good network is also primordial for the good functioning of the AC and that it should be taken into account.

Julia Rubeck (DG MARE) thanked the Secretariat for its dedication and the good relationship that has been established with the EC. **Pascale Colson (DG MARE)** agreed and underlined the importance of stability and reliability in this relationship.

The ExCom recommendation is adopted and the Secretariat services contract for the next three years will be renewed with AliénorEU.

Cécile Fouquet (Secretariat) took the floor to thank all the AAC members for their renewed trust and support, as well as the Chair, the WG Chairs, the regretted AAC Chair Richie Flynn who trusted AliénorEU with this mission and Marc-Philip Buckhout (Vice-Chair) who was a great help in the first years.

9. Approval of new 'Other interest groups' ExCom members

The Chair reminded the GA that 4 seats for OIG members remain empty in the

ExCom. Unfortunately, no application was received to fill these seats.

Nancy De Briyne (FVE) suggested to send another call for applications with more information about the time and involvement needed to be part of the ExCom.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) asked if the process of joining the ExCom is always open or if it is necessary to wait for a specific call for candidacy. This flexibility seems necessary.

The Chair approved. He recalled that these applications should be approved by the GA's respective stakeholder group.

The option of leaving open the possibility to apply at any moment to the ExCom empty seats was adopted. Each individual allocation will require approval by the ExCom.

10. New AAC 1st Vice-Chair

The Chair thanked Marc-Philip Buckhout for his good work as AAC 1st Vice-Chair, mentioning that it has been a pleasure to work alongside him.

He was however sorry to say that no application to replace him had been received. He wanted to remind the GA that this position can only be filled by an OIG member and that it is important that it is filled soon.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) added that, unlike the AAC Chair, the AAC 1st Vice-Chair needs to be a member of the ExCom.

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) added that this rule is specific to the internal rules of the AAC but could be modified if necessary.

11. Proposal on the definition of the AAC's stakeholder categories

The Chair briefly presented the Task Force's draft and explained that there is still no consensus on all the definitions.

Douglas Waley (Eurogroup for Animals) said that although there have been positive exchanges on the matter, the Task Force is not close to reaching such a consensus.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) identified the definition of the "operator" as being the problem. However, "operator" is clearly defined in EU regulations. Some members of the Task Force would like to broaden this definition to include other actors such as suppliers, service providers, etc.

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) insisted on the importance of continuing with this discussion and suggested that the FG proposes several definitions to the EC that could then provide some advice. Moreover, she advised to rely on the "operator" definition given by the CFP.

Ola Öberg (RECIRKFIK) recalled that there has also been a discussion around who benefited economically from aquaculture or not.

Jan Kappel (EAA) also identified the balance issue between the two categories of AAC members.

Bernhard Feneis (COGECA) proposed that any member wanting to join the AAC should support the development of aquaculture as a precondition to avoid losing more energy on these matters.

The Chair proposed to take Pascale's advice and submit a set of definitions to the EC for opinion. Members of the Task Force Ola, Doug, Jan and Bruno agreed.

12. Calendar for next year of AAC meetings

The Secretariat presented the dates agreed on by the ExCom for 2021.

The calendar was adopted as presented:

- February 2, 3 and 4: WG and ExCom meetings
- June 1 and 2: WG meetings
- July 20: ExCom meeting
- September 21: General Assembly
- October 26, 27 and 28: WG and ExCom meetings

13. Brexit

The Chair presented the ExCom proposal of inviting the current British AAC members to all 2021 AAC meetings as Active Observers therefore allowing them to claim reimbursement for their travel expenses.

The Chair explained that this way will allow the AAC to reflect on the pertinence of that solution, knowing that it would cause a difference between the Active Observers not paying fees but still receiving reimbursement and the other AAC members.

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) asked why the AAC wanted to limit this to 2021.
Bruno Guillaumie explained that this was to match it with the fiscal year.

Sarah Horsfall (Shellfish Association of Great Britain) and **Oliver Robinson (British Trout Association)** expressed that, should the GA approve this decision, they would be grateful of that opportunity as they have appreciated to be involved in the AAC's work.

Ola Öberg (RECIRKFISK) asked if this statute can be attributed also to Norwegian organisations.

The Chair confirmed this possibility but reminded that invitations are done on a case by case basis and should be in the interest of the AAC members.

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) added that it is not compulsory to reimburse Active Observers and that Annex III of the CFP regulation defines who can be invited as an Active Observer.

Maria Luisa Alvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA) expressed her disagreement with this decision, advocating that the UK has decided to leave the EU and that the UK should pay if it wants its members to come to the AAC meetings. However, she did not wish to oppose **the adoption of this decision by consensus**.

The proposal of inviting the current British AAC members to all 2021 AAC meetings as Active Observers and therefore allowing them to claim reimbursement for their travel expenses was approved by consensus.

14. AAC new members

Marie-Christine Monfort presented the International Organisation for Women in the Seafood Industry (WSI) who joined the AAC in September 2019.

Bruno Guillaumie (EMPA) suggested to indicate on the AAC website the composition/ratio of men/women of each of its instances (GA, EXCOM, WGs... and secretariat).

Pascale Colson (DG MARE) recalled that gender equality is a very important matter for the new Commissioner.

15. Conclusions of the meeting and debate on the role of the AAC and its contribution to the Green Deal

The AAC members were divided into small groups to discuss and reflect upon how the AAC could contribute to the Green Deal objectives, making sure that every member would have the possibility to contribute to the debate.

Each discussion group designated a rapporteur, who presented the conclusions of their group:

Leo Kirchmaier (ALFAA) was the first group rapporteur to take the floor: his group expressed frustration about the fact that EU aquaculture is not growing as expected. A push in communication towards consumers who often live far away from production sites is needed, with an emphasis on the product itself. Administrative burden to create new aquaculture facilities should be reduced and the process must be made easier. More aquaculture programmes should be made available in schools and universities to attract young people into aquaculture. Finally, it was mentioned that the COVID crisis has shifted consumers' habit, making them more prone to buy local. The group thought that it could be interesting to focus on that aspect of "how to bring the fish to the consumer".

Phil Brooke (CIWF) was rapporteur for the second group: the Green Deal should include social aspects such as gender equality and workers' rights. Concerns were expressed about the level-playing field, notably in the case of higher environmental standards that third countries do not have to meet, putting the EU at a competitive disadvantage. This concern, however, should not stop progress (social and environmental aspects, animal welfare). A scale of international standards is necessary (for instance, some countries outside the EU are more advanced regarding humane slaughter). It is important to keep referring to scientific data.

Fernando Gonçalves (APA) was rapporteur for the third group: some issues were already mentioned by Phil, notably about the level-playing field. It is important that the Green Deal takes into account the carbon footprint of imported products, as 2/3 of seafood products consumed in the EU are imported. The same goes for the social aspects behind those imported products.

Jean-Christophe Raymond (CNPMEM) was rapporteur for the fourth group: they reflected upon communication elements towards consumers. A first suggestion was to focus on the people behind aquaculture, on the job aspect. The production sites are often very beautiful. Another aspect of this communication should be to promote the fact that aquaculture is a source of sustainable animal protein. Thirdly, it is important to stress the advantages of EU production as being local, at human scale high quality in terms of nutrients and with environmental and social higher standards.

Bernhard Feneis (COGECA) was rapporteur for the fifth group: the impact of the COVID crisis has hit differently the EU countries and maintaining a level-playing field has been made even more difficult for some (Italy for instance). A clearer link needs to be established between the Green Deal and the discussions for the next EMFF period. For instance, there has been a proposal to develop more organic aquaculture but the possible localisations available for this type of aquaculture have been reduced. Coherence is needed.

Marco Gilmozzi (FEAP) was rapporteur for the sixth group: everyone, from the sector and OIGs welcomes the Farm to Fork objective but all of us have concerns. Will the increase sustainability objectives also mean increased production prices? Will this allow aquaculture to respond to the food security challenge? Will EU aquaculture remain competitive in terms of prices? If needed, EU aquaculture producers will raise their production costs but the level playing field with imported products should be guaranteed. The AAC should push the EC and the EP in this sense. EU Aquaculture should attract more young people, continue to foster dialogue with stakeholders and continue growing in a sustainable way.

The Chair thanked all participants, all the points mentioned will fuel the future AAC work.

16. AOB

There was no request to take the floor.

17. Date and place of the forthcoming General Assembly meeting

The next GA meeting will take place on **September 21, 2021**.

There will also be an extraordinary GA in February to approve the final 2019-2020 budget.