

Aquaculture Advisory Council

WG3 Horizontal Issues

14 October (14:30-17:30) and 15 October 2025 (10:00-12:20)

COPA-COGECA – Rue de Trèves, 61 – 1000 Brussels – Interpretation available in EN - FR - ES - IT

Minutes

PARTICIPATION LIST

WG3 MEMBERS

Charlotte Epinay (Eurogroup for Animals, WG3 Chair),
Yannis Pelekanakis (HAPO, WG3 Vice-Chair),

Leo Kirchmaier (ALFAA),
Lorenzo Gennari (AMA),
António Correia (APA),
Andrea Fabris (API),
Marine Levadoux (CIPA),
Phil Brooke (CIWF),
Florian Guillou (CNPMM),
Pier Salvador (COPA),
Angeles Longa Portabales

(CRMG),
Joaquin Garrido (CRMG)
Brian Thomsen (Danish Aquaculture Producer Organisation)
David Bassett (EATiP),
James Hinchcliffe (EFFOP),
Thibault Pivetta (EMPA),
Patrizio Giorni (FAI CISL),
Danilo Santini (FAI CISL),
Pierpaolo Piva (FAI CISL),
Javier Ojeda (FEAP),
Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP),

Lone Flyvholm (FEAP),
Ole Christensen (FEFAC),
Alain Schonbrodt (FVE),
Teresa Morrissey (IFA),
Anna Pyć (Polish Trout Breeders Association),
Addy Risseeuw (PO Mosselcultuur),
Christian Vorbeck (RECIRKFISK),
Ola Öberg (RECIRKFISK),
Paul Denekamp (Stichting Vissenbescherming).

Excused: Maria Luisa Alvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA), Giulia Malerbi (ALI), Hein Sas (NORA)

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Invited: Lorella de la Cruz Iglesias (DG MARE), Benjamin Jeannot (DG Environment), Florian Claeys (DG Environment), Julian García Baena (DG MARE), Federico Cardigos (ESTAT)

Observers: Joe Redfern (Shellfish Association of Great Britain), Linn Hosteland (Norwegian Coastal Shipowners Association), Philine zu Ermgassen (Endangered Landscapes & Seascapes), Wasseem Emam (Ethical Seafood Research), Pierpaolo Piras (Committee of Regions)

Member States Experts: Magdalena Tenciu (Romanian Institute of Research and Development of Aquatic Ecology), Fishing and Aquaculture Galati), Veerle Campens (Flemish Agency for Agriculture and Sea Fisheries), Marta Martínez López (Spanish Ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food), Luz Arregui (General Secretariat of the Spanish Ministry of agriculture, Fisheries and Food), George Broulidakis (Greek Ministry of Rural Development & Food).

Secretariat: Cynthia Benites (AAC Secretariat), Alicia Mouthuy (AAC Secretariat)

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MEETING MINUTES

Welcome words by the Chair Charlotte Epinay

The Chair welcomed the participants.

1. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was approved with the following AOBs requested by:

- **David Basset (EATIP)** on the EU-funded SCARFISH project
- **Ola Oberg (Recirkfisk)** on hidden and unpaid labour in aquaculture
- **Szilvia Mihalffy (FEAP)** on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and follow up of DG MARE updates

The minutes of the last meeting on 03-04 June were adopted by written procedure.

2. Presentation on the proposed regulation on data collection

- Presentation of the proposal for regulation on European fisheries and aquaculture statistics COM(2025)435 by **Frederico Cardigos (ESTAT)**
- Exchange of views with the members
- Presentation on the procedure for engaging an external expert to prepare a study for the AAC by the **Secretariat**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

Frederico Cardigos (ESTAT) presented the proposal aiming to consolidate multiple old regulations into a single framework aimed at improving data quality, reducing administrative burden, and enhancing flexibility by 2030. The discussion focused in particular on unfertilised eggs, data on fish welfare and the collection frame. The topic leader **Brian Thomsen (Danish Aquaculture)** presented a draft recommendation to be approved before the end of the public consultation. He explained that an external study is no longer needed for the preparation of this draft recommendation, which is included in the AAC Strategic Plan for 2025-2026.

The topic leader will consolidate the draft recommendation with members comments, to be sent for approval to the WG and ExCom by 4 November.

3. DG MARE updates

- Presentation by **Lorella de la Cruz** and **Emilia Gargallo** (DG MARE), "Aquaculture Team"
- Exchange of views with the members

- Strategic Guidelines actions, Guidance Documents and Mid-term assessment

New guidance documents and e-learning modules on climate change adaptation, energy transition, and access to space are being rolled out with training sessions planned through early 2026.

The General Code of good practices on fish welfare and general fish welfare indicators will be published in October. The Environmental Performance Staff Working Document, which aims to provide practical tools to producers without imposing new obligations, will be released by the end of 2025. The new factsheets on Good Husbandry Practices (GHP) for turbot, sole and meagre will be published together with existing GHP on the EU aquaculture website. The next guidance documents DG MARE will focus on the environmental benefits of aquaculture and on predators.

The Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism is currently preparing documents on bivalve mollusc farming challenges, reporting obligations for EU aquaculture activities, aquaculture and a circular economy approach. Afterwards, work will focus on a document outlining strategies to attract investment to the aquaculture sector.

The mid-term assessment of the strategic guidelines will be published in October.

- Ocean Pact and related files including the Ocean Act and EU Initiative on Sustainable Aquaculture

The European Ocean Pact will provide a framework for future aquaculture actions, including multi-use of marine space, algae production scaling, and blue bioeconomy innovation.

- Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2040

The evaluation of the CFP, the mid-term assessment of the implementation of the EU aquaculture strategic guidelines, the competitiveness compass and the nature restoration law will feed into the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2040.

- New MFF and funding for aquaculture and provisional legislative timeline

The upcoming MFF 2028-2034 proposes a radical restructuring of EU funding, emphasizing greater flexibility for member states through the National and Regional Partnership Fund (NRP Fund) while ring-fencing €2 billion for fisheries, aquaculture, and maritime affairs. Member states will have discretion to allocate funds based on regional priorities, with Commission support for crisis response and specific sector needs.

- Evaluation of the CFP

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) evaluation, EMFAF ex-post evaluation and EMFAF midterm evaluation are underway, feeding into the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture to align sector development with sustainability goals.

- Upcoming technical studies

The study on ecosystem services of bivalve mollusc farming and fish farming in ponds and wetlands, and challenges and opportunities in promoting those benefits will be published in October. The study on feed for aquaculture will be released early 2026.

- Taxonomy

The EU Taxonomy currently excludes aquaculture as a priority sector but this does not hinder sustainability recognition or finance access; revisions are planned for 2026 with possible future inclusion.

Many WG members reacted to the presentation. Lorella de la Cruz Iglesias encouraged continued dialogue, information sharing, and stakeholder engagement.

4. Annual survey to Member States

- Presentation by **Lorella de la Cruz, DG MARE**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

Lorella de la Cruz (DG MARE) presented the latest annual survey sent to Member States. The 2026 survey will focus on description of indicators, baseline-reference period, format and gaps. A discussion will also be organized at the next technical seminar, to be held in February 2026.

A FG will be created to prepare the recommendation included in the AAC Strategic Plan for 2025-2026 and a call for a FG leader will be open.

5. Research for aquaculture

- Presentation of the draft recommendation on Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation of Research by FG leader **David Bassett (EATIP)**
- Exchange of views with the members and adoption of the recommendation

FG leader **David Bassett (EATIP)** presented his draft recommendation. He explained that he will add a few references on existing channels for communication, dissemination and research into his draft. He also invited the members to provide ways on how to provide recommendations to the Commission/Member States/other

actors on the further identification of practical solutions.

The recommendation was adopted and will be submitted to the ExCom for approval before the end of October.

6. Information on the Primary Producers WG of the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking

- Presentation by **David Bassett (EATIP)**
- Exchange of views with the members

As **David Bassett (EATIP)** became the Vice Chair (Aquaculture and Fisheries) of the CBE-JU Primary Producers Working Group, he provided a state of play of the project. It is an EU-funded project that addresses aspects of circularity within the bioeconomy. The CBE-JU has established a working group of primary producers, structured around three thematic areas: agriculture, forestry, and the blue economy (which includes fisheries and aquaculture). The blue economy sector is unrepresented in the group, and **David Bassett encouraged aquaculture producers to register and take part.**

7. Industrial contaminants

- Presentation of the draft recommendation by FG leaders **Andrea Fabris (API)**, **Marine Levadoux (CIPA)** and **Thibault Pivetta (EMPA)**
- Exchange of views with the members and adoption of the recommendation

The **FG leaders** presented the draft recommendation on industrial contaminants. Due to a lack of time, feed contamination issues were not included in the recommendation and will need to be addressed in the future.

The recommendation was adopted and will be submitted to the ExCom for approval before the end of October.

8. Water resilience strategy

- Presentation by **Benjamin Jeannot (DG Environment)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

Benjamin Jeannot (DG Environment) presented the European Commission's Water Resilience Strategy (WRS) published in last June. As a next step, **the WRS's implementation will be assessed via a Water Resilience Forum starting December 2025, a midterm review in 2027 and a final evaluation in 2029.** The presentation sparked strong interest among WG3 members, particularly regarding the benefits of shellfish and fish farming for improving water quality. Members also noted that the volume of information presented was overwhelming and emphasized the importance of highlighting the diversity within aquaculture. **The file will continue to be monitored.**

9. Nature credits roadmap

- Presentation by **Florian Claeys (DG Environment)**

- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

Florian Claeys (DG Environment) presented the nature credits roadmap. Many members reacted to this presentation, such as regarding who would finance the tool, the public acceptance and social aspects. **Florian Claeys** took note of the comments of the WG members.

10. Use of satellite data for aquaculture

- State of play by FG leader **Lorenzo Gennari (AMA)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

Lorenzo Gennari (AMA) presented the draft recommendation on the use of satellite data for aquaculture, which was previously approved by the WG. He emphasized the need for a data management system, ideally centralised on a single platform.

The recommendation will be sent to the ExCom to be approved before the end of October.

11. Other technical studies to be carried out by external rapporteurs for year 2025-2026

- Presentation by **Charlotte Epinay (Chair)**
- Exchange of views by the members and decision on next steps

As a follow up of a previous recommendation on small scale aquaculture, **Ola Oberg (Recirkfisk)** explained that a study needs to be conducted to clarify how small- and large-scale aquaculture contribute differently to societal, environmental, and economic goals. He clarified that this study should be conducted by the European Commission (EC). **David Bassett (EATIP)** explained that the EC plans a Horizon call for supporting small scale aquaculture in 2026-2027, but a clear definition and understanding of small-scale production levels across Europe are needed. The discussion focused on the need for the study to also reflect market realities, recognizing that species and production systems affect enterprise size and viability. Concerns were raised about the ambition to compare pros and cons due to limited data.

Ola Oberg will revise the draft and coordinate with the Chair on the next steps.

12. Revised fisheries control regulation (2023/2842)

- Presentation of a draft recommendation by **Brian Thomsen (Danish aquaculture)**
- Exchange of views by the members and decision on next steps

Brian Thomsen (Danish Aquaculture) proposed to draft a recommendation to ask the EC to establish minimum digital system requirements for Chapter 3 products (live, fillets, frozen fish) and delay their mandatory digital reporting from January 2025 to align with Chapter 12 and 16 product deadlines in 2029. **Javier Ojeda (FEAP)** emphasized the urgency of postponement, highlighting the disproportionate burden on small and micro enterprises, and confirmed strong collaboration with fishers and other stakeholders to advocate for this. FEAP and Europêche already addressed the issue to the EC.

A draft recommendation will be prepared and shared with the Market Advisory Council (MAC), as this topic falls within the competence of the MAC.

13. Working Group Chair and Vice-Chair for 2025-2028

- Reminder of the rules of procedure by the **secretariat**
- Appointment of the Working Group Chair and Vice-Chair for the period 2025-2028

Charlotte Epinay (Eurogroup for Animals) was reelected as Chair of the WG3 for 2025-2028, and **Yannis Pelekanakis (HAPO)** was reelected as Vice-Chair of the WG3 for 2025-2028.

14. AOB and conclusions of the WG3 meeting

Three AOBs were added:

- **EU-funded SCARFISH project**

David Bassett (EATIP) raised a forthcoming EU-funded SCARFISH project aiming to survey EU aquaculture production volumes, values, and research gaps, inviting industry feedback to avoid duplication and ensure data accuracy.

- **Study on hidden and unpaid labour in aquaculture**

Ola Oberg (Recirkfisk) highlighted the issue of hidden and unpaid labour in aquaculture, particularly among women, migrants, and family members, proposing investigation into its scale within the EU and suggesting possible study or project involvement. **Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP)** noted ongoing Horizon projects researching labour issues, providing potential starting points for further work.

- **Recommendation on the MFF budget**

Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP) proposed that the AAC works on a recommendation on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) budget cuts affecting aquaculture, volunteering to be the topic leader, emphasizing the need to monitor and align new ocean and climate initiatives effectively. **Szilvia Mihalfy** asked the AAC Secretariat to closely follow up the development of the different topics raised and invite DG MARE to attend meetings in order to share their views. She highlighted the need to be proactive, especially given the forthcoming publication of the Ocean Act and the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture. She finally explained that since FEAP is involved in the ActFast Project, which focuses on climate change mitigation, she requested the coordinators to be invited to future meetings related to climate change.

The Chair concluded the meeting. The next WG3 meeting will be held online on **25 February**.